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The Sixth of June

LIONEL SHAPIRO



Waterfront

BUDD SCHULBERG



Reckless: Pride of the Marines

ANDREW GEER



The Tree of Man

PATRICK WHITE

BOOKS ABRIDGED, INC. *New York*



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PRINTED IN
THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THE SIXTH OF JUNE

by Lionel Shapiro

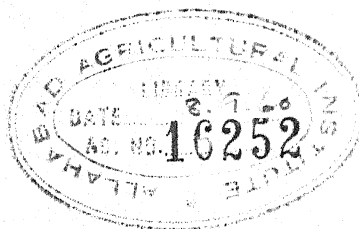
THE STORY OF A CONFLICT BETWEEN
LOVE AND DUTY, AND HOW IT WAS
RESOLVED ON A FLAMING BEACH
IN NORMANDY DURING THE FIRST
HOURS OF *The Sixth of June 1944*



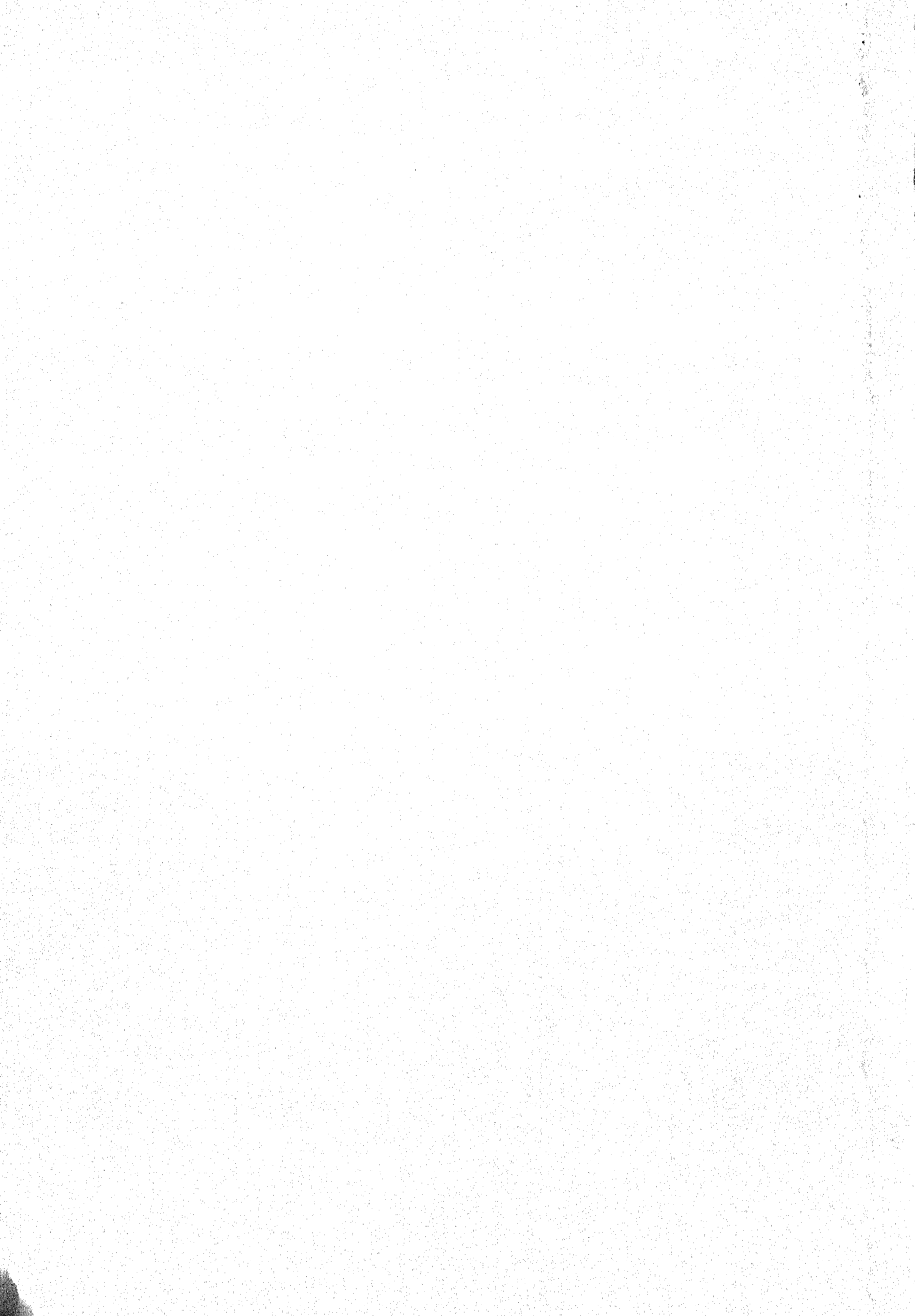
AN ABRIDGEMENT

The Author

LIONEL SHAPIRO has been a working newspaperman ever since his graduation from McGill University in 1929. During the war, he accompanied Canadian troops and his by-line stories appeared in leading newspapers all over the world. *The Sixth of June* is his third novel, following *The Sealed Verdict* and *Torch for a Dark Journey*.



THE SIXTH OF JUNE—Lionel Shapiro
Published by Doubleday & Company, Inc.
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BOOK ONE

Two Farewells

1

SO MANY were leaving, so many and mostly so young. They poured out of their homes and moved urgently to the last barricades, for the war was nearly three years old and the lesser barricades had already been overrun. They were all sorts and sizes and shapes, men in such myriad variety and combination that the important personages who pondered global charts and issued global orders must have felt a trifling of what it means to be God.

From where Lieutenant Brad Parker stood, on the railway platform at Malton, Connecticut, his global view was somewhat constricted by a group of thirty relations and friends.

His handsome wife, Jane, stood beside him neither snugly nor coldly but with a sure sense of possession, and the first semi-circle that faced him was composed of his father-in-law, Damien Lakelock, who was publisher of the *Malton Daily Star*, his mother-in-law, Grace Lakelock, and his own mother, Delilah Parker.

As Brad scanned the faces that looked upon him with such well-behaved glumness, he felt a curious elation, soaring but secret. Being a sensitive man, he knew that elation was a wrong, even a sinful way to approach war. But he was also an honest man. The war had come at the right time for him. Five years ago would have been too soon. Five years hence might well be too late; a mature marriage, perhaps children, and the tentacles of the Lakelock dynasty might have smothered any urge for a fling with adventure. At twenty-six, for reasons he dared not admit to himself, the time and the war fitted perfectly. His

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Aunt Ellen, of the Parker side of his family, had unwittingly put it into words at the luncheon when she whispered, "Don't you feel grand, Brad? You *must*. First Lieutenant Bradford Gamaliel Parker, United States Army—it just sounds *so wonderful!*"

It *was* wonderful to a man who hadn't enjoyed a real chance to flex his muscles and was already weighted down as assistant to the publisher, heir apparent to the executive tower, president of the Junior Chamber of Commerce, and a director of the Country Club.

His gaze fell on his father-in-law's gray, distinguished face. Their eyes locked for a moment and he knew that Damien was sharing his secret, that the wry smile was a smile of envy for a chance that was lost long ago. Damien had been in the same position in the first war, married to Grace, the only child of Everett Bolding, founder of the Malton *Daily Star*. Everett saw to it that Damien's uniform carried him no farther than a desk job at the Boston port of embarkation.

He too had felt something of that frustration when they called him up as a reserve officer just after Pearl Harbor. He had volunteered for the Special Service Force, training in Helena, Montana, in parachute and winter warfare, but Jane had gone along to live with him in married officers' quarters and there were monthly leaves home and constant telephone conversations with Malton, and at least the suspicion that he might remain stateside as an instructor. Now, inexplicably, the War Department had given him a fortnight's embarkation leave and had reassigned him to London. He was going to have his war at last.

A crusty voice called out, "Careful, folks!" and they all moved aside to make passage for a mail cart moving to the head of the platform. Then the train whistle sounded. They were all around Brad now, slapping him on the back and making brisk, jocular remarks, but most of what they said was drowned in the roar of the engine as it rumbled past them.

Brad kissed his mother on the mouth and then on the cheek. "Take care of yourself, Mother, and don't worry about me."

Then he kissed his mother-in-law. He thought he detected a

furtive note as she said simply, "You'll write Jane often, won't you?"

Damien didn't say anything. He shook hands with Brad and smiled the same soft envious smile.

The Lakelock chauffeur was already handing up Brad's baggage and Jane's overnight case to a Pullman porter.

"Good-by, everybody," Brad called out. "Write you from Berlin around next Thursday. Might be a day or two late." They all laughed. He took Jane's arm. "Come on, dear. Up you go."

Standing on the platform of their Pullman as the train moved slowly out of the station, they appeared to the farewell party as fine and decorative as the American dream itself.

2

IN ENGLAND it was coming up to nine o'clock in the evening.

The sky over Lincolnshire had been overcast all day, and now a gentle rain fell on the village of Burlingham. Along High Street and the common, blackout curtains had already been drawn. The only light to be seen was a tiny red glow which marked the entrance to the village pub, The Stag at Bay, and even this minuscule break in the blackout pattern, although permitted by the authorities, disturbed the elderly residents of Burlingham because German planes lately had been prowling the skies in the vicinity of the R.A.F. Bomber Command station at Belnorton, four miles to the east.

On this evening, as the day's last light glistened feebly on the wet fields, an ungainly, mud-spattered military vehicle called a 1500-weight rolled into Burlingham, circled the common, and came to a halt in front of a house, half-hidden by trees and wrinkled with ivy, which bore the name plate "Darjeeling."

Captain the Hon. John Wynter sprang from the vehicle. "I'll be about half an hour, Bailey," he called back to the driver.

The captain pushed open the gate, passed along a path

rimmed with rosebushes, and pulled at a bell beside the door. He had a slim figure, even wearing the coarse cloth of British battle dress. His eyes, pale blue and inordinately mild, looked out rather sadly from a face that was tanned and weather-beaten. His features seemed a bit too finely shaped, the nose too thin and the mouth too sensitive, for the rough masculinity associated with his shoulder patches which bore the legend Commando.

He pulled off his beret as the door was opened by a tiny, dark-skinned woman with hair of pure white. "Good evening, Mala."

"Captain Wynter! Do come in out of the rain."

John hesitated. "I'm afraid it's a rather impolite hour, but I couldn't get through on the phone——"

"I am sure you will be welcome. Do come in. The brigadier is always pleased to see you," she said with a faintly proprietary air, "to say nothing of Miss Valerie."

"Oh good. Then she's here too."

The tiny woman led the way through an entrance hall to the living room. She said, "I daren't disturb the brigadier while he's listening to the news——" She smiled obliquely. "But I'm sure Miss Valerie won't mind."

She left, and a few moments later Valerie Russell came into the room.

"What a wonderful surprise, John," she exclaimed. She came across to where he stood and extended both her hands.

He said, "It's good to see you, Val, but I think I should explain. We left Inveraray this morning and when the colonel gave me permission to break out of convoy at Doncaster, I tried to get you on the phone but the trunks into this area seem all tied up, and——well——"

"Bother the trunks," she said lightly. "It couldn't matter less. It was grand of you to come." She gave his hands an extra little squeeze and went to a sideboard for a sherry decanter and glasses. "You look absolutely fit. Commando training must suit you. Now do sit down and tell me all your news."

He didn't sit down, nor did he speak at once. His pale blue eyes studied her as she concentrated on pouring two glasses of sherry.

She was the loveliest girl he had ever known; indeed, the loveliest he had ever seen. Middling tall, she possessed both suppleness and carriage in unusual harmony. Her light brown hair, which contained a tint of red, swept back severely from her forehead and offset her generous lips and her deep brown eyes.

She handed him a glass of sherry. "You must excuse Father for a few minutes. He still marks up his war maps, the poor dear, according to the BBC reports."

"How is he, Val? Really?"

"He seems improved—at least physically. Even the scars are healing over. The trouble is, the stronger he gets the deeper he falls into his peculiar bitterness. I don't know——" She looked into her sherry glass. "They've really retired him, haven't they?"

John said, "He's still on the sick list—officially, that is. But—well, things have changed. War isn't the same and Britain isn't the same." He looked up and smiled sadly.

She said, "You mean old Indian army officers are no longer in style."

"More or less. Pity. He's a wonderfully brave soldier."

They fell into silence. Then Valerie said brightly, "Do forgive me, John, nattering about Father. Are you happy with the Commandos—you certainly look as if you are—and how did you ever manage to break off convoy at Doncaster?"

"It was a sort of embarkation privilege. You see, Val, I'm off."

"John! On operations? So quickly?"

He nodded. "It's really grand news. The division isn't going. Just a reinforced company, sort of small Commando. We rendezvous at Aldershot tomorrow afternoon and—well, I suppose it's safe enough to tell *you*, Val—we proceed to a southeasterly port for embarkation. You know what that means."

"The Middle East?"

"Good guess, I imagine. I should be off in fifteen minutes."

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"But John! You may be away for months!"

He smiled shyly. "I know it's a bit of a rush, but I'm luckier than most chaps in the company. They can't get home at all. The orders came through only last night. Between Bailey and myself, we can drive all night and make London early enough to give him a couple of hours with his wife. Then we'll pop down to Tunbridge so I can see my father for a bit, and we should hit Aldershot dead on time. Works out rather well."

Valerie said, "Then we'd better go in and see Father."

They passed through the hall and paused at the door of the brigadier's study. The nine o'clock news was still on.

John whispered, "Oh Val, do you think, afterward, we might pop across to the pub? One drink. Just the two of us."

"Of course, John. I want to." She knocked lightly on the study door and opened it.

The brigadier paid no heed to the interruption. He sat stiffly in an armchair and stared straight ahead. He was a tall man, and his cropped, steel-gray head framed the face of a born warrior. It was a lean, knobbly face with a chin which jutted belligerently as he listened to the wireless. Only the eyes betrayed the warrior. They were small, spiritless eyes which stared dully from dark circles of discolored skin. On the right side of his face, a pattern of ugly keloid scars scampered across his chin and neck and was lost beneath the collar of the tropical bush jacket he wore.

"Father."

"For God's sake, girl, can't you see I'm listening?"

"John is here."

"Well, can't he wait? Shush——"

". . . Commenting on the fall of Tobruk, Reuters correspondent observes that while the situation is serious, it is by no means devoid of hope. The arrival of increasing supplies of American Sherman tanks with their high speed and improved maneuverability——"

"He has only a minute or two, Father. He's off overseas. To the Middle East."

The brigadier reached a long arm to the wireless on his desk

and turned it off. "Serious but by no means devoid of hope," he scoffed. "These piddling experts! What do they know about it?" He turned about and when he saw John standing behind Valerie he nodded and his mouth lost its scowl.

"Come in, Wynter."

"Thank you, sir." John dropped his arms stiffly at his sides for a quick moment and entered the room. "You look fit, sir."

"I'm quite all right." Brigadier Russell smiled narrowly as he studied the junior officer. "Sit down and tell me about this Com-mando of yours. Is it any good?"

John glanced at his watch, then at Valerie. He sat on the edge of a chair and detailed his company's stiff training schedule.

"First class. Absolutely first class." The brigadier's eyes took on an unaccustomed sparkle. "And now, Valerie tells me, you're off to the Middle East."

"We've had emergency embarkation orders. I can only guess it's the Middle East."

The iron-gray face clouded over. "Are you in the habit," he thundered, "of spouting emergency embarkation orders to your friends? By God, Wynter! I thought I taught you better."

John said, "I see what you mean, sir. But it's rather difficult to be going off for months or years——"

"What's difficult about it?" the brigadier demanded. His chin came up and the keloid scars on his neck stood out inflamed and ugly. "We've become a bunch of ninnies. That's the trouble. Ninnies! We should be standing up to the Hun, standing up to him and driving him back. You remember St. Omer. You de-coded the order yourself. Fall back on Dunkerque. What non-sense! Fall back on Dunkerque! I said, stand and fight! At-tack! Cut off their damned line at Béthune! Or die! If I hadn't caught their shrapnel, I'd have gone on ignoring the damned order——" Now his voice turned faint and strangely plaintive. "You know, Wynter, why they're keeping me on the sick list. Two years and still on the sick list. When I go back they've got to give me a division and they're afraid I'll fight. You know that, Wynter. You know it, don't you?"

John said, "I hope you get your division, sir. I'll be proud to

serve with you again." He glanced anxiously at Valerie. "I'm afraid I have to leave now, sir."

"All right. Good luck." The brigadier stood up. He towered over the captain as they shook hands but his gaunt frame swayed slightly and the steel-gray head with its black eye sockets was a shell.

Outside it was black as pitch, and silent except for the feather whisper of rain. Valerie took John's hand and conducted him down the walk and the roadway. The press of his fingers on hers was inexpressibly shy and tender. She felt like weeping although she could think of no urgent reason for it.

She didn't know him really well. They had met in the military hospital at Watford. It was on a Sunday, sunny and warm and deathly quiet. The defeat at Dunkerque had stunned the people of Britain into a haze of unbelief.

She had come down to London from the A.T.S. station at Lincoln on compassionate leave. She had waited for six miserable days while the survivors of the British Expeditionary Force were sorted out in countless ports and beaches on the southeast coast; until that Sunday when the War Office called her to say that Brigadier Frederick Hassard Russell was to be found in the military hospital at Watford. She had stood looking down at his unconscious eyes which were the only part of his face and neck uncovered by bandages, and in the welter of frantic visitors in the forty-bed officers' ward she had scarcely taken note of the haggard young man in filthy battle dress who hovered near the brigadier's bedside. And then an M.O. had come by, saying, "By the way, Miss Russell, Lieutenant Wynter can tell you what happened. He was there. Matter of fact, he escorted the stretcher all the way from St. Omer until we had your father safely on the operating table."

She saw him again several weeks later, after her father had returned to "Darjeeling" on convalescent leave. John had arrived to fulfill his last duty as the brigadier's aide. He spent two days compiling an official record of the ghastly defeat at St. Omer.

During the next twelve months he had showed up several times, whenever his military journeyings brought him remotely into the area, and he seemed quietly content with tea or a meal and the evidences that the brigadier was gradually recovering from his wounds. But in the summer of 1941, when he decided to volunteer for the Commandos, he had asked her to come out for a walk in the fields and it was to her that he haltingly broke the news of his decision.

His subsequent visits became as frequent as the stern regimen of Commando training allowed, and although he spent most of the time chatting with the brigadier about the new daredevil corps which was to spearhead Britain's return to the offensive, an understanding, unspoken yet vivid, came into being that the purpose of his journeys to Burlingham was to see her. He had family of his own, of course. He was the second of Viscount Haltram's three sons but he apparently derived scant warmth from a leave spent at Smallhill, the rambling manor house near Tunbridge Wells in Kent. His mother had been dead for years, his older brother Derek was with the Royal Dragoons in the desert, his younger brother Bertie a fighter pilot, and his father was old, introverted and bookish.

As the months passed she came to realize that she had unwittingly penetrated the fabric of his life. In the Britain of blood and tears, the only softness left to life was a woman's softness and she was urged to extend it to this gentle, diffident soldier. She often wondered how much of the urge extended to the symbol and how much to the man himself.

Indeed, his very diffidence constantly puzzled her. She had not been surprised to know that he had fought fearlessly at St. Omer, for she had been brought up in military stations and cool-headed bravery was to her a normal attribute of the British soldier. Yet she was completely unprepared to hear that in his first action as a Commando, the raid on Vaagso Island the previous November, he had won his captaincy and an immediate award of the D.S.O. for breaking the hard core of resistance by closing on the two senior German officers and killing them with

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knife thrusts in the throat. She would not have believed it of this spare, shy man if her father had not read to her, with appetite, the War Office report on the action.

Even now, as they made their way through the gloom of the common, she could scarcely believe it of him. The feel of his hand holding hers was like that of a small boy being led to school.

A faint, diffused light broke over the common, giving black definition to the buildings ahead on High Street. In almost the same instant the scream of a multi-engined plane, still distant but rising in volume, broke into the silence.

John said incredulously, "A raid?"

"A fighter-bomber, probably." She listened intently. "It's a German, all right. Hear that rhythmic crump? They try to shoot up the runway at Belnorton pretty regularly——"

The wail of Burlingham's siren shattered their ears. It rose and fell in pitch for a long, sickening minute, and when it petered out the sharp rattle of Belnorton's light ack-ack filled the night sky. Streams of orange tracers leaped up between the shafts of light. They hurried over the cobblestones toward a tiny red light which marked the entrance to The Stag at Bay.

3

SEVEN hours out of New York the full-bellied B-24 suddenly dipped its starboard wing. The twenty-seven men who had been dozing on bucket seats in the converted bomber came nervously to life and peered through the windows. From seven thousand feet they saw Labrador's endless succession of bald hills separated by valleys of green scrub and chains of tiny lakes.

As the plane swung level and then banked sharply on its port wing, cigarettes were lit all over the cabin. Some of the men took to staring at a forward door marked "Crew only." Eventually the door opened and a staff sergeant poked his head out.

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"Cigarettes out!" he bellowed over the racket of the engines. "We're in the approach pattern for Goose Bay. Refueling takes forty minutes and there's a canteen on the field. Better eat good. There'll be nothing more till we hit Prestwick. That"—he added knowledgeably—"is in Scotland."

Someone barked, "What about this parachute harness, Sergeant?"

"You don't need it on the next hop, sir." The sergeant noted that his questioner was a full colonel. "Can't do anybody much good over the ocean."

Brad twisted his chest buckle, slapped it with the flat of his hand, and the parachute harness fell away. He put on his trench coat. Under New York's blazing sun the plane had been a furnace; now the air was sharp and thin and cold. He noted for the first time that he was the only junior officer in the cabin. There were two civilians; a gaunt, elderly State Department courier, and a curly-headed young man who had identified himself as a war correspondent for *Time*. The others were field officers, majors and both ranks of colonel, accompanied by a sprinkling of staff sergeants; clearly administrative people who probably didn't know a Garand from a grenade.

The plane had begun to lose altitude. The steady pitch of the engines gave way to gasps and surges, and the wings shuddered in the bumpy air. As a veteran of eight jumps, Brad enjoyed watching the body gyrations and paling faces of the others, especially the full colonels who had looked so formal and fearless on boarding the plane.

Brad was not given to vanity. Yet in this company of civilians and desk soldiers he liked the distinction of having been combat-trained. The men of the Special Service Force regarded themselves as elite soldiers; it was an integral part of the course that they should, for they were at once parachute, raid, and winter troops, and many a recruit who would be acceptable in an ordinary infantry outfit had been washed out during the first two months at Helena.

He wasn't braver than the next man. This he could admit to

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himself, although the Special Service Force, being fully volunteer, had tried to nurture in him the notion that he must be. He hadn't volunteered in the same spirit that Dan Stenick, for instance, a born adventurer, had deliberately sought out an extra hazardous duty. He, in truth, had stumbled into it.

It happened a week after Pearl Harbor. He had been summoned before a white-haired colonel in the Evaluation and Assignments office at Hartford. The man, thumbing through his R.O.T.C. and reserve record, had said, "Hmm, so you're Bradford Parker. You know, Parker, if there's one thing we need right here in this headquarters it's a public-relations officer. Want the job?"

The notion of spending the war in Connecticut appalled him. He turned it down flatly.

"All right," the colonel said, returning to the record, "let me see. It says here you made the cross-country ski team at Dartmouth. Well, we've got a brand-new outfit organizing out at Fort Harrison. Going to specialize in winter warfare. They need skiers. How does that strike you?"

Fort Harrison was at Helena, Montana, half a continent distant from Connecticut. That struck him fine.

The colonel's eyes twinkled in a blank face, like a born practical joker. He said, "Looks like a pretty hot outfit. They prefer volunteers. Might even be some parachute jumping involved. Still strike you fine?"

He remembered how the challenge had given him pause. Thinking it over, he had heard the colonel murmuring, "We sure could use a good public-relations officer at this headquarters——" and that had done it. The day after Christmas he was on his way to Helena.

The family had been shocked. Although it was beyond question that the *Star's* heir apparent, being of military age, should get into uniform, this seemed too much.

Only Janie seemed to understand exactly what had happened. "Listen, darling," she said to him that night, "you don't want to be a parachutist. I know you too well. You're not the kind that goes looking for trouble, but you're not the kind that steps

away from it either. You did what you had to do and I'm proud, but I hope they wash you out at Fort Harrison."

Dear Janie! She possessed that sixth sense of behaving exactly as she knew he would want her to behave. This morning was the perfect example. She had accompanied him to the door of the Military Transport Office at La Guardia Field. In the corridor a throng of excited wives and sweethearts and children waited while their men went inside to present their travel orders. There were tears and lingering kisses and an occasional sob.

"This is as far as I go," she had said. "Good-by—good-by, Brad. Don't be too brave or too foolish. Just remember I want you back exactly as you are." Then she had kissed him and walked away swiftly. She had been fine—fine and brave and neatly disciplined, just as he had hoped she would be.

4

Ten hours later Brad had his first glimpse of the Old Country. The plane crossed high above a gray coastline and he saw what looked like a shuttered resort hotel built long and narrow on an escarpment facing an angry sea.

Banking for its approach run, the plane passed low over a solid expanse of rust-colored roofs each thrusting up uniform clusters of chimneys. Rain began to fall as it taxied to a halt before a dun-colored shack which bore a sign, "U. S. Army Air Forces, Transport Section."

Chilled and hurting with weariness, Brad nibbled at a lunch of franks and beans, and blindly followed a transport officer down a hall to a waiting room, unpainted and unfurnished except for a scattering of wooden chairs.

The T.O. said, "I know you're all dying to get to your billets, but Croydon's fogged in right now. Take it easy and we'll do the best we can."

Their best turned out to be three unbelievably long hours of waiting and then a rocky ninety-minute flight in a C-47 through

pelting rain as far as Bristol. The rain was still slanting down when they landed.

The journey to London was a nightmare of bone weariness and exhaustion and disappointment. He had impressions of being driven from Paddington through caverns of rain and pitch darkness to a billeting office and thence to a room that was sickeningly cold and smelled of dust. He fell asleep thinking it was a strange June and how terribly far he was from Malton.

The morning was wonderfully fresh and sharp with slanting sunlight.

On Grosvenor Square uniformed Americans converged from all directions toward a huge red apartment building which housed ETO headquarters. Brad spied a flight of tiny fighters, undoubtedly Spitfires, pass high over the sprawling city. In a few minutes they would scream across the Channel where the enemy, droning in the sky, awaited combat.

This was the brink of war and he a part of it at last. He strode across the square in a tremor of exhilaration.

An image of Dan Stenick fell into his mind.

Of all the junior officers he had served with at Fort Harrison, Dan Stenick had stimulated him most. Dan was different from anyone Brad had ever met. His life had been a patchwork of bizarre jobs and high adventure. He had no family he ever spoke of, and his spirit admitted no restraints. Now Brad, like Dan, was footloose at last, disentangled from the Lakelock dynasty, delivered out of the bondage of being Brad Parker.

Inside headquarters a Wac captain glanced at his orders, checked his name on a long document filled with names. He was directed to report to Lieutenant Colonel Timmer—in Operations! He offered up silent thanks and went off briskly. He could not know that the selection of this card lying among hundreds was the first of a series of accidents, tiny but inexorably chained, that was to lead him to a meeting with Valerie Russell.

BOOK TWO

Valerie

5

THE 8 A.M. train for Peterborough, Doncaster, and Hull hadn't left King's Cross Station and here it was nearly nine o'clock. An air alert had hit London just after midnight, and although the main enemy thrust had been blunted halfway up the Thames estuary, two Heinkels managed to squirm through to the city and a stick of bombs looped down over the north-west suburbs.

A brakeman passing through the corridors of the stalled train saw an American lieutenant sprawled in lonely grandeur in a first-class compartment.

"Won't be long now, mate," he said, leaning into the open door. "Give 'em another ten minutes. The Jerry left a bit o' fuzz on the track. Up near Hendon, it was."

Brad said, "Will I miss my connection? I've got to change trains at Newark."

"Going up to the bomber station?"

"Wherever I'm going, I've got to change trains at Newark. Will I miss the connection?"

The brakeman winked. "That's the spirit, mate. I know it and you know it and the Jerry knows it. But"—he cupped his mouth and his voice fell to a whisper—"no use letting the bloody Mesopotamians know it. No, sir, your connection will be sitting nice and pretty on the track waiting for you. About fifty Yanks back in third class, they're all changing at Newark too."

When the brakeman left, Brad glanced over the *Daily Express* he had bought in the station. The headline read: AUSTRALIANS SMASH AT ROMMEL'S FLANKS and the dispatch beneath was about fighting in the desert near a place called

Sidi Barrani. A small item near the bottom of the page hinted at a major naval battle in the Solomons but there were no details. He searched the paper for a report about last night's air raid and found only a three-line item: "An alert sounded in London at 12.33 A.M. Anti-aircraft fire was later heard in most districts of the city. The all-clear sounded at 1.48 A.M."

Last night's air raid had been his first. After three weeks in London it had finally happened. He had looked forward to the experience, and now, thinking about it, he felt singularly chagrined. Of all the nights to pick for a bender! It was a pity, for he had promised Damien he would write a chatty letter describing his first air raid, the intention being to publish it, anonymously of course, on the *Star's* feature page. There was nothing he could write. His only recollection was of a frolicsome night, some wonderfully gay bravado on the streets, and innumerable drinks in a variety of places. He hadn't been so drunk, he recalled mournfully, since his freshman year at Dartmouth.

It had all begun at four in the afternoon when Lieutenant Colonel Timmer summoned him into his office.

For three weeks he had been waiting for the summons, three interminable weeks of idling at a desk in a large office in which everyone else, about twenty staff officers and enlisted specialists, worked with speed and a certain air of excitement on a great mass of documents. He had heard the word "Sledgehammer" whispered about and he guessed it was the code name for an operation, but he knew better than to ask. His duties consisted of reading the London papers and clipping everything pertaining to the American forces, seeing to it that the colonel's staff car was brought around from the motor pool whenever it was needed, and acting as a courier to other offices on the same floor. He was clearly on probation even with the other junior officers. He spent the evenings wrestling with his lonesomeness in the American Officers' Club on South Audley Street. The days passed slowly.

Now the summons had come.

He was followed into Lieutenant Colonel Timmer's private office by a pfc. carrying a pot of coffee.

The colonel waited carefully until the pfc. left the office. Then he said, "I don't know how *you* are, Parker, but I work hard and I play just as hard as I work. But"—he compressed his lips—"the minute I walk out of this office nights, I don't know any more about the war than my youngest kid back home and she's going on four."

Brad could believe it, at least the part about playing hard. Alex Timmer would command equal attention at a cocktail party or in a room full of wrestlers. He had a hard, square, handsome face and a low rasping voice that was absolutely without shading. He looked and talked like a composite of the dedicated professional soldier, but he happened to be, Brad knew, a Minnesota automobile salesman in civilian life.

Brad said, "I've been fully briefed on security, sir."

"Where?"

"Fort Harrison, sir, and naturally I've studied the regulations here very thoroughly."

Timmer picked up a folder from his desk. "You've had the course all right," he said. "A lot more than you realize. We've made a full field investigation of you here and back home." He turned the pages of the folder. "Good family line, good life history, fitness reports okay, and you look like you can stand the gaff." He tossed the folder aside. "The Department's cleared you a hundred per cent. Where are you billeted?"

"I'm still in transient, sir. I thought I'd better wait until I knew where I stood."

"Smart. Billet's important. Don't kid yourself there aren't any German agents in this town. Plenty of 'em."

Brad said, "Captain Boyce has offered to let me share his apartment." Captain Boyce occupied the next desk to Brad's in the outer office.

"Boyce is all right. Where does he live again?"

"Arlington Flats, sir. Just along Grosvenor Street."

"Good enough. Our secret service keeps it covered."

"Thank you, Colonel."

He let Brad get as far as the door. "But remember, the fact that Boyce works in this section doesn't mean he knows everything you're going to know. Understood?"

"Understood, sir."

"That's all," Timmer barked. "Consider yourself on the team. And good luck." He was reaching for the coffeepot as Brad left the office.

During the next two hours a whole new exciting world was opened up to Brad. He was allowed to learn that Operation Sledgehammer was a plan to pinch off the Cherbourg peninsula before the end of summer. The objective was twofold: to seize the area as a launching platform for an eventual full-scale drive into northwest Europe, and to relieve the mounting political pressures for an immediate second front. Seven months after Pearl Harbor, the people back home were impatient to start winning the war. They didn't know, as he had just learned, that the total American strength in Europe was two incomplete and partially trained divisions.

It was well after six o'clock when Brad moved his gear from his transient billet to a handsome six-story apartment house called Arlington Flats at 37 Grosvenor Street. He felt complimented that Ray Boyce had selected him to share this de luxe location.

Raynold Boyce was clearly a mettlesome fellow. He was a political adviser attached to Lieutenant Colonel Timmer's section. His direct commission (by order of the War Department) had interrupted a brilliant career as a lecturer in political science at Georgetown.

"Absolutely amazing Timmer's agreeing to let you share this apartment," he said over their third drink. "I'd an idea he doesn't completely approve of me."

On the fourth drink they took to comparing notes on their respective wives. Brad dug into his baggage for a photo of Janie, and Boyce produced a snapshot of a petite, vivacious girl balanced precariously on a hammock.

THE SIXTH OF JUNE

In a burst of unanimity they determined that the occasion called for a meal and a fine bottle of wine. There was only one place, Boyce decided, and that was the Savoy Grill.

"Timmer? Wonderful machine, Alex Timmer," Boyce said at dinner, mooning over the last of Montrachet. "Plays bridge Sunday, Tuesday, and Thursday nights, reads military history Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, goes on the town Saturday nights and gets horribly boiled. He's a perfect push-button individual who someday will be a perfect push-button general fighting a perfect push-button war. If you have any ambitions in the military, hitch your star to Alex Timmer. He's going way up, he and electronics."

"He doesn't look like the bridge type to me."

"He isn't," Boyce replied. "He's bursting to get a star on his shoulders and bridge has become a mania among the professional staff officers. The word's gone 'round that Eisenhower is a bridge fiend. Timmer would break into the Reichs Chancellery with his bare hands if it brought him favorably to Ike's attention. That's how ambitious he is. He knows he's got to be twice as good as the West Pointers at practically everything or else he'll never get that star."

They began drinking brandy after dinner.

Brad didn't recall how or when he got back to 37 Grosvenor Street. He was awakened by a persistent telephone at six in the morning. It was the night duty officer in Timmer's section.

"Report in at seven," he said, "you've got a courier job. Better bring a musette bag. You'll be away overnight."

6

FROM the open window of her upstairs sitting room Valerie cautiously observed her father. He sat ramrod straight in the front garden, his khaki tropical jacket buttoned up to the neck despite the enervating heat of a humid, cloudy afternoon.

His only movement was the flick of his swagger stick against his calf in regular, dispirited strokes.

Nevertheless, she believed, he was making progress. For the third successive day now, he had let himself be persuaded to take tea in the front garden instead of moping in the privacy of the rear lawn.

The inspiration for the shift devolved from Mr. Sargenter, who was captain of the Burlingham company of the Home Guard. He had suggested to Valerie that the brigadier might agree to favor the company with a few crumbs, as he put it, from the great supply of his battlefield experience. The notion of encouraging her father to take an interest in the life of the village had long been exercising her mind. Here was an opportunity.

Thus had begun the campaign to shift the brigadier's tea to the front lawn while the Home Guard exercises were in progress. On the common some sixty assorted gentry were lined up in two meandering rows and held their first war Lee-Enfields at the slope. Mr. Sargenter walked slowly and sternly between the ranks, sniffing at each rifle. On the grass in front, the company's prized possession, a Bren gun, rested on its bipod alongside three wooden facsimiles.

A train whistle shrilled across the village. The connecting train from London was nearly an hour late, Valerie noted. The BBC morning news had mentioned a seventy-five-minute alert in the metropolitan area, and she had fallen into the habit of guessing at the severity of the raid by the lateness of the train. Thinking about it, her mind fell to London and to the letter which had arrived yesterday.

"Dear Valerie," Lady Gantling had written in a neat hand on War Office stationery. She had known Valerie since childhood, Lord Gantling having been a subaltern in India during the early twenties.

"I have been thinking about you rather often since your visit last week. It was good to hear that the brigadier, of whom my husband and I have such fond memories, is better.

"Your request for termination of compassionate leave has

been referred to the proper quarters and has been granted, although I must say there are no immediate postings for section officers. For quite some months now we have stopped accepting officer candidates in the women's services.

"We would like to second you for special duty with the American Red Cross. The A.R.C. has forwarded a request for a number of British girls of breeding and ability to assist in a liaison capacity in their clubs and leave centers, which are springing up all over London.

"I don't want you, my dear Valerie, to think of this as light or unimportant duty. Mr. Churchill, Mr. Bracken, and the new U. S. commander, Major General Eisenhower, have spent many hours in conference over the problem of meshing a million or more Americans into the life of our island.

"I consider you particularly suited for this assignment. I am enclosing your travel order and look forward to seeing you in London as quickly as possible . . ."

Several American soldiers, walking from the railway station, had drifted along the edge of the common. They watched, grinning broadly, as the Home Guard under Mr. Sargenter's stern commands, lined up in two ranks in the center of the common.

One of the Americans whooped, "You know something? It looks exactly like the St. Patrick's Day parade in Passaic."

Mr. Sargenter turned about and looked at the youngsters with pained and infinite patience.

"Ooh, the man's mad. You mad, pop?"

"Wait a minute, fellas. There's the guy who owns the bar. He might put a mickey in our beer."

"That *gotta* be an improvement!" This remark seemed to convulse the Americans. They rolled about, doubled up with laughter.

Valerie watched Mr. Sargenter walk grimly across the grass toward the Americans. She glanced anxiously at her father. He had pulled open the gate and was standing in the roadway. His swagger stick, tight in his fist, whiffed the air.

She hurried downstairs.

In the office of Major Allan Mills, adjutant of the 632nd Bombardment Group, Brad shifted restlessly on an exceedingly hard chair. He had delivered a thick, double-sealed envelope to the adjutant, and wished the man would return with a signed receipt and dismiss him. He was furiously hungry.

Major Mills finally reappeared. "It's pretty damned ridiculous," he kept muttering, "pretty damned ridiculous." He was a compact little man with a neat, worried face. "You fellows down at Plans sure have it easy. An office and a mimeograph machine and you're operational. We're not so lucky. We've just inherited this pigpen and few half-trained crews, and right away they want us to suggest feasible targets for Sledgehammer. Who're they kidding? Sledgehammer! On the target date they've got here, we couldn't dent a tin can."

Brad said. "I don't know anything about it, sir. I've been ordered to bring back a set of tracings."

"We'll have it for you in the morning."

"Thank you, sir. Can I be put up on the station?"

"I guess we can fix you up——" The telephone rang. "Mills here . . . Yes. . . . Yes . . ." He listened, scowling into the phone. "For God's sake, Dennis, why bother me with it? I'm trying to get this post set up. Do I have to handle the provost's work too? . . . Oh . . . Oh, no!" He glared at Brad and grimaced broadly. "You say a brigadier? . . . A wounded brigadier! Oh God, I'll be right out." He slammed down the telephone.

He said, "I've got to go, Lieutenant," and reached for his cap. "Officers' quarters are in block E—that's three huts over and turn left. You'll find——" He paused and glared at Brad. "By God, we'll leave that till later. I want you to come with me."

The adjutant led the way out and climbed behind the wheel of a jeep. Brad reluctantly took the seat beside him.

"It's time you people down at ETO knew exactly what's happening up here," the adjutant muttered. He swung the jeep roughly around a bend and raced down the main roadway.

"We get a scorcher from Eisenhower. Demands urgent meas-

ures to maintain ideal relations with the civilian population. Maintain! That's the joker. Hell, we've been lepers from the word go. Even *I* sometimes wonder what the hell we're doing over here and I'm supposed to have a better than average I.Q. You can imagine how these kids react."

Brad said, "What's happened now, Major?"

"I don't know, but it's sure got our provost all excited. Some mishmash about a scuffle with the Home Guard, only this time a British brigadier got mixed up in it, a wounded brigadier no less," he groaned.

For a moment after they reached the common they could see nothing remotely resembling a disturbance. The Home Guard stood in a haphazard semicircle watching Mr. Sargenter struggle with the breechblock of a Bren gun he was trying to dismantle.

"There they are," the adjutant said. He stepped on the accelerator and roared around the common to the opposite side where seven American enlisted men stood easy in the roadway looking glumly at a captain wearing an MP brassard.

When he reached the group, he and the MP captain walked a piece down the road and stood talking earnestly for a few moments. Then they returned. The adjutant walked along the line, his sleeve almost brushing the men, and stopped before a dark, wiry youngster who carried three chevrons under his AAF patch and silver wings on his chest.

"What's your version, Gerbett?"

The sergeant blurted, "The rest of the fellas will tell you, sir——"

"I asked you to tell me."

"All I have to say is I don't have to take a whipping from anybody, sir, I don't care who it is. The other fellas'll tell you. I didn't even see him coming. That guy there"—he pointed out Mr. Sargenter, who was still concerned with dismantling the Bren gun—"he came over trying to give me a line of crap and before I know it somebody is whipping me from behind, right on my neck too, so I turned around and grabbed the stick and let him have the same, just one, sir, and I broke the stick

and threw it on the ground and then a girl came rushing over and broke it up and took the old man away. That's the truth. The other fellas will tell you, sir."

Major Mills looked at him painfully. "You in the habit of hitting old men?"

"I told you, sir. I didn't see him till after he hit me. Anyway, I don't care if I get broken back to private for it, sir, I'll hit anybody who hits me first. I'm an American soldier, sir. My own officers can burn me down to the nub and I'll take it, but I don't have to take any whipping from any limey and nobody can make me."

Someone along the line said, "That's the truth, sir. That's exactly what happened." The others chorused, "Yes, sir."

Mills said, "What were you men doing here anyway? There was a vehicle at the station to pick you up."

"We weren't due back on post till 1800, sir," the sergeant replied. "We figured we'd wait around till the pub opened and have ourselves a beer before we went back."

"So you decided to pass the time riding these men who are doing what they can to help win the war. Is that it, Gerbett?"

"We weren't riding them, no more than they ride us, sir," Gerbett burst out angrily. "They been giving us the silent treatment ever since we got here like we were Japs or something. We're human beings too. All the fellas feel the same way. We didn't ask to come over here and——"

"That's enough out of you, Gerbett." Mills turned to the provost. "Take 'em back. Confined to post until further orders, all of 'em, and no club privileges."

He watched the men being marched around the bend of the common. He said to Brad, "All right, Lieutenant. What do you think?"

Brad said, "The sergeant seems to have a case. He missed his calling. He's a real barracks-room lawyer."

"Notice the Home Guard?" Mills asked bitterly. "Just look at 'em. Not even coughing in our direction. You'd think we weren't alive. That's the real trouble."

Brad tried to look lucid and concerned, but he was thinking of a drink, a meal, and bed. He edged toward the adjutant's jeep.

"Not yet, Lieutenant. I've got to look in on the brigadier. Maybe if I rub his fine English fur the right way, he'll let it pass." They walked slowly along the road and pushed unhappily through the gate of "Darjeeling."

Mala showed them into the living room with a proud, baneful look about her. "I will inform the brigadier," she said. "I'm not sure he cares to see anyone."

A hum of rain falling on open fields came abruptly to their ears. They watched through the window as the Home Guard trotted off the common toward High Street, shielding their rifles inside their jackets.

After a time Brigadier Russell entered the room. He acknowledged his visitors with a brief nod, and walked to the fireplace. In the failing light his small eyes were scarcely visible in their great, dark sockets.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting," he said in a low voice.

The adjutant stepped forward. "I'm Mills, group adjutant at Belnorton, sir. This is Lieutenant Parker of ETO headquarters. I would like to offer my very sincere regrets for the behavior of one of our men this afternoon."

He paused for a rejoinder but the gray face remained impassive. He went on. "We'll have the man up on charges of course, and from what I know of the incident I think I can assure you he will be adequately dealt with——"

Again he paused hopefully. There was no response except for an accelerated blinking of the flaccid eyes.

The adjutant waited a moment. It occurred to him he might be talking to a deaf man for the keloid scars pushed close around the right ear. He leaned forward and said loudly but with deep concern, "Do you hear me, sir?"

"I hear you perfectly well, Major. You haven't told me why your men were loafing in the village."

The suddenness of the rejoinder stiffened the adjutant's back.

LIONEL SHAPIRO

He said, "Well, sir, they were simply on their way from the railway station. They'd been on leave."

"You still haven't told me why they were loafing in the village."

"The village is not off limits to our men."

"Then I suggest you consider putting it off limits."

The American said slowly, "It's a pretty drastic thing to do way up here—I don't blame you, sir, for feeling bitter. The fact that you were struck by one of our enlisted men——"

"The fact that I was struck by one of your men has nothing to do with it. He had every right to strike me. I thrashed him thoroughly before he could get his wits about him."

"Surely you gave him a warning, sir!"

"I am not in the habit of parleying with street urchins."

The adjutant's eyes blazed. "The street urchin, as you put it, sir, is an American airman who's over here to fight a war."

The brigadier's mouth worked for control before he spoke. "The war has been going on some little time now. I suggest he begin fighting it."

"I can see there's no point in continuing, Brigadier. That man is three thousand miles from home and the odds are five to one he'll never see it again. If you people hated the Germans just half as much as you hate us, maybe we wouldn't have to be over here at all." He swung around to Brad. "Come on, Lieutenant. Let's get out of here!"

The adjutant paused, frowning, at the door. He said quietly, "I'm sorry, Brigadier. I came here with the best intentions but—damn it, we've got to run our own show in our own way."

Mala was at the front door to let them out. They doubled through the rain to their jeep, swiftly pulled up the canvas top, and climbed in. The adjutant lit a cigarette and leaned wearily against the wheel. He said, "Friendly, eh? That'll give you some small idea."

Brad said, "He's a sick man."

"What the hell," Mills said defensively. "They're all sick. They were licked in '40 and they're still taking a walloping."

What are we supposed to do? Do we borrow a piece of their crying towel and sit around telling them how wonderful they are? Or do we start fighting this goddamn——”

Brad cut in. “Wait a minute, Major. We’ve got company.”

Valerie had come up on the driver’s side of the jeep. She was breathless as though she had run. Her light brown hair was darkening in the rain and her blouse clung wet to her shoulders. She said, “I won’t keep you a moment, Major. My name is Valerie Russell. You’ve just seen my father.”

“Miss Russell——” Mills groped for words. “It’s just one of those things, Miss Russell. There’s nothing we can do about it except hang on, I suppose, and hope for the best.”

“There *is* one thing, Major,” she said. “You had the men marched off. Will they be punished?”

“Do you think they should?”

“Most definitely not. My father was clearly in the wrong.”

The adjutant looked at her a long time as though to make sure he had heard her correctly. She didn’t seem to be aware of the pelting rain. The corners of her mouth turned up and made a half smile that was both anxious and sweet.

He said, “Say, Miss Russell, you’re getting wet. Why don’t you climb in for a minute.”

“I don’t mind the rain. I rather like it——” She smiled broadly now. “You see, we think even rain, our own English kind, is something quite special. We’re a most peculiar people, Major. We take a lot of knowing. We haven’t been hospitable to your men or gracious about our partnership or even thankful. We’re not very good at being thankful because we’ve not had occasion to be thankful to anyone, except possibly to God, for several hundred years. But we’ll learn, Major, really we will. Do be patient with us.”

She spoke the words crisply and with a content of warm humor. The front of her blouse was sodden now, clinging like a bathing suit.

The adjutant said, “You’d better be getting back. You’re good and wet. And thanks a million, Miss Russell.”

"Good luck, Major."

She hurried off. Mills' face was wistful, quizzical, and a good deal happier than it had been.

He murmured, "Holy Moses," and stepped on the starter.

7

ON THE next morning, when Valerie arrived at the station platform in the pony trap, among the scattering of persons waiting for the train was Brad.

The stationmaster tipped his cap and came forward to lift her luggage from the trap. Brad heard her crisp, pleasant voice say, "Isn't it a glorious morning, Mr. Dulcram," and he realized with a start of sheer delight that she was Valerie Russell and that she was obviously going to take the same train. He hurried toward her.

He didn't expect her to remember him. He saluted informally and explained the circumstances of their meeting yesterday.

She smiled warmly. "How nice of you to remember me. How really nice!" Her eyes, deep and unbelievably lucid, looked up at him with genuine pleasure.

He said, "Perhaps we can find two seats together."

"I do hope so. It's a miserably dull trip alone."

No guile, he thought, no airs, no affectation. And yet she was beautiful. Standing in yesterday's rain in her thin blouse, she had given him an impression of softness and grace, and now, though she wore the shapeless khaki the British regarded as a proper uniform for girls, her face was completely beautiful in a way he was sure he had never before experienced. It shone with compassion and honesty.

"Let's promise," she was saying, "not to talk about the wretched war. I wonder if I've forgotten how to talk about anything else. We'll try, shall we, Mr. Parker?"

The first-class carriage was jammed. They found a space at

the upper end of the corridor. He put down her cases and they both sat on the larger and sturdier one.

The whistle hooted and the train raced south across the countryside. She talked of India and how dearly she had loved that land, of a trip to Paris and her first dance at the Embassy.

Brad told her about Dartmouth, and skiing trips to Mont Tremblant in Quebec. He liked the way she listened with intensity, and he liked her remark when they talked about the Revolution: "It was the only war we ever lost, but then it was British fighting British."

A group of Waafs squatting in the corridor began to sing "The White Cliffs." Almost everyone up and down the corridor joined in.

"There'll be bluebirds over the white cliffs of Dover

"Tomorrow, just you wait and see,

"There'll be love and laughter and peace ever after

"Tomorrow, when the world is free . . ."

The voices were mechanical and sad, and when the song petered out the carriage was quiet except for the click of the wheels on the rails.

Valerie said, "We British don't cry very well, do we?"

He said, "We weren't going to talk about the war."

"I think we've done well. Do you hate the war as much as I do?"

He said, "I deplore it but I can't say I hate it. Of course I've got what they call a cushy job. The fellows in the Solomons or Tobruk probably have other ideas."

"I hate it. I've lived through it for three years and I hate it for what it's done to me and to everything and everyone I love."

He said, "It doesn't sound much like Mr. Churchill's finest hour."

"My father was part of the finest hour. You saw him."

"It's better than being defeated."

She said, "Sometimes I wonder. We had another finest hour

—on the Somme in the first war. Sixty thousand of our men died between dawn and dark on the one day.”

For a time they were silent.

She thought how lucky it was that he was stationed in London. He was so very brisk and alive and he probably danced well. She thought it was splendid she had come to know someone in London so quickly and that he was an American who had not forgotten how to be gay.

Brad thought of this girl who was different from any girl he had ever met, who could speak of India and of Paris as if she held them in her hand and stroked them, who was romantic in a way that was completely removed from her loveliness. He thought he had never heard anyone speak so crisply and beautifully, who was so plainly sincere and yet so fugitive. He thought of his twenty-six years filled with a sense of duty, first to his mother and then to Janie. He thought how only yesterday he felt fine to be free and irresponsible, and now he wanted to see no one else in England except this girl.

They began speaking again. She told him about John Wynter and he told her about Janie, and they talked with studied earnestness about the people to whom they owed their primary loyalty, as if it was necessary and urgent to do so.

The train raced into the outskirts of the city, across factory sites and emergency-landing strips with a few tiny planes on them.

He said, “I’d like to see you in London.”

“I’d like you to, if you can put up with me. I’m afraid I’m not terribly cheerful.”

He said, “I can put up with you.”

FOR Brad the autumn of that year of 1942 was singularly frantic and happy. Operation Sledgehammer had been abandoned as being too costly. The passage of those chill, wet

THE SIXTH OF JUNE

months marked the last stages of preparation for Operation Torch.

The men in Timmer's section worked around the clock, snatching a few hours of sleep only when their senses refused to function properly. They worked with urgency on a ponderous volume of operational orders designed to gather up the men and impedimenta of a great British-American force, to dispatch it in hundreds of ships of varying sizes and speeds over thousands of miles of ocean, and to fling it upon the North African shore on a schedule so tight that a delay of minutes might bring disaster.

Timmer drove them on, using his enormous vitality to set an almost impossible example. Even Ray Boyce, who had been regarded as a chronic laggard behind the convenient façade of a thinking machine, even he fell into the spirit of the section. The political problems attached to an invasion of Vichy French territory were colossal. It was not unusual for him to enter a conference at eight in the morning and to emerge at midnight. At one point he disappeared for a fortnight under mysterious circumstances. When he bounced back into the office he was carrying what for wartime England was an unheard-of delicacy, a bag of lemons.

He wouldn't divulge where he had been but winked a blood-shot eye and murmured, "I'm saving 'em. When this jig's over, we'll be the only people in England drinking real tom collinses."

As Timmer's personal aide Brad enjoyed a wider appreciation of the plan than most of the others. He was kept racing on a variety of assignments between his headquarters and Norfolk House in St. James's Square where the high command for Torch was barricaded. He was driven by the realization that this operation, if it could be successfully carried off, would mark the war's turning point, this in co-ordination with the British attack at El Alamein which was to be launched two weeks earlier.

The effect on him was an exhilarating sense of purpose. It was an altogether wonderful war. It had placed Malton and all its works in a conveniently tiny perspective. It had delivered

him from the necessity of bleeding over carefully worded letters to Janie. He could truthfully scrawl a few lines saying he was well and furiously busy and would she forgive the brevity. And it had conferred sweet absolution on his meetings with Valerie, for the sheer physical strain of that autumn had transformed these from a clandestine delight into a fervent necessity.

On the morning of November 8, the great British-American force swarmed ashore at Casablanca, Oran, and Algiers.

It is doubtful whether General Eisenhower and his personal staff at Gibraltar awaited the first reports with more intensity than the men of Timmer's section. The first reports which arrived shortly before noon were garbled and inconclusive. Patton's task force at Casablanca had met unexpectedly stiff resistance from the French garrison and there were hints of a naval action in the harbor of Oran. The haggard, subdued men continued to pace the office. Then, in midafternoon, came the signal from the key point, Algiers. It read, in the graceless jargon of the military: D-day objectives secured, tactical surprise extreme, casualties light, scattered.

The men, huddling over the signal, began chortling about the biggest binge in history. Ray barked sternly, "Synchronize your watches, men. Rendezvous at four, 37 Grosvenor. Pass-word, tom collins."

A few moments later, Timmer's door opened. "Will all officers please come in."

They gathered about his desk and watched him rub his stubble in slow, thoughtful strokes. "Men," Timmer said, his small eyes spearing the coffee rings on his desk blotter, "I want personally to thank each and every one of you. This section has done a horse of a job. We showed 'em. We won't get any credit for it—hell, we don't expect any—but I want you men to know how I feel personally."

He ranged the circle of faces around him. "Just one thing." His eyes fixed on Boyce. "That was lousy security, Ray, bringing back those lemons. You knew there wasn't a goddamn lemon in England. I'll pass it this time but you'll never know

how close you came to a court-martial." Ray, it turned out, had been one of a party of officers that had scouted Spanish Morocco in search of a line on Arab political attitudes.

"All right, men," Timmer concluded. "Go and get boiled if you like."

Timmer's complaint served to make a merry party at 37 Grosvenor even merrier. Collinses were passed out in such profusion that Brad felt it necessary to appropriate two of the lemons so that Valerie might enjoy the windfall when she arrived from work.

It still lacked an hour before she would be off duty. They had promised themselves a gala evening, drinks at the apartment, dinner at a French restaurant on Jermyn Street, and dancing at the Savoy. But, glancing about the apartment, he was troubled. The girls some of the men had brought along were questionable.

Boyce had invited a red-haired, somewhat overstuffed girl who was a barmaid on the Strand. Molly was her name and she had been in show business. On the urging of several drinks she proceeded to prove she could shimmy better than Gilda Gray ever dreamed of. Ray had made a special point of asking among others a tech sergeant named Felder who did German translations for him. Felder, a small, sad, bespectacled refugee whose parents had died in the ovens at Nordhausen, had brought along a girl who was equally small, very young, and grossly overpainted.

The moment Valerie arrived, Brad found that his apprehensions had been foolish. Her presence seemed to have an immediate and sedative effect on the other girls. Felder's little friend squeaked, "Awfully pleased to meet you, I'm sure," almost curtsied, and shrank into a corner. Molly sat down for the first time. By the time Brad had prepared and brought out her drink, the party had become focused on Valerie. She moved about the room easily, warmly, rekindling the merriement but on a new level.

Later, as they were riding to Jermyn Street, he said, "Turned

out not a bad party. Ray of course is stark, raving mad. Can you imagine him lecturing to college students? I'm sorry though about those girls."

She smiled a contemplative smile. "I loved the sergeant's little girl. She's tarty and shabby and her face needs a good old scrub, but she's the war, Brad, just as surely as the raids and the rubble. When it ends we'll all have to pick ourselves up, all of us, and make ourselves clean—if we can."

He recognized the mood. He said, "You've heard from the desert."

She said, "You're wonderfully prescient. I wish you weren't." She looked out among the bobbing flashlights on Piccadilly. "Yes," she said, "I had a letter today. It's Major Wynter now. They've given him the company."

She didn't tell him that John's unit had been thrown into the line at Alamein and that the former company commander had been killed. She didn't need to tell him. From the tone of her voice he divined as much and more.

They dined handsomely and talked foolish and wonderful talk which sprang from an abundance of wine and the joy of being together. When dinner was over they fairly frolicked down the Haymarket and across Trafalgar Square to the Savoy and fell eagerly into each other's arms on the small dance floor.

They danced every dance, and for long blissful periods they were lost in each other. Then, suddenly, while the band was playing something lilting and innocuous from an Ivor Novello operetta, she said, "Please let's not finish this one. Please not, Brad."

They glided to a halt. She said earnestly, "I do apologize, Brad."

"Did we barge into some very special song?" he asked, as they returned to their table.

She faced him honestly. "Nothing like that, darling. Don't ask me why it happened. I simply don't know."

A waiter refilled their glasses, but now the magic had gone out of the wine. She did know, he thought, watching her over

the rim of his glass. Her eyes were glistening. It was as if the whole structure of their lovely evening, like Cinderella's midnight, had come crashing down. She made no objection when he called for a bill.

They walked slowly and silently into the Strand, savoring the clear, crisp night. Presently they passed down the steps to the Mall.

From a bench along the walk they studied the squat lines of the old state mansions. They heard Big Ben strike two o'clock. They sat close together, their hands tensely clasped, and for a long time they suffered the dishonest silence which had fallen over them.

Then she said, "What has happened to us, Brad?"

"Too easy," he said bitterly. "Give me a hard one."

"We can't go on this way."

"It's my problem. You're in the clear."

"In the clear," she echoed. "It's sweet of you but it happens not to be the case. I let it happen. There was no point at which I didn't know what I was doing. That is, until now. I can't go on and I can't stop. I'm hopelessly adrift. And don't blame the war, darling. The war has nothing to do with—with us."

A picture of Malton emerged out of a deep crevice of his mind and came vividly before him.

He said, "I didn't come loaded for bear—believe me, Val. I remember too well how it was the first time I saw you standing by the jeep out there in the rain. You were pretty—no, you were beautiful. I'd never known an English girl before and I thought it would be nice if I could give this one a whirl, a nice romantic whirl for a nice well-bred English girl, something I could put down on the credit side of the war and think about someday when I'm full of business and belly. That's the way it started," he said, "but it didn't last long that way. A couple of days. Maybe just the couple of hours on the train."

He had been talking into the graveled verges of the path and now he lifted his head and turned to her. "I'm the villain in the

piece. I'm married to a girl who loves me and I'm sure prays for me every night. But don't ask me to stop seeing you. I won't. I can't."

She said, "You're not helping me."

Suddenly the sirens began to scream sickeningly over the quiet city. Out in the open the sound came at them from many directions. When it died out they heard the boom of guns far down the estuary. It didn't seem important for them to move.

Now they could hear the roar of many planes. All the guns nearby thundered in quick succession. He pressed his hands over her ears and held her close against the wall under the arch.

The guns fell suddenly silent. Only the searchlights continued to scour the night sky. He loosed his hands from her ears.

"Frightened?" he asked.

She said, "No, darling. I was thinking it doesn't matter about us. The war will make it right. God alone knows how, but I'm sure the war will make it right."

9

WHEN Brad dashed into the office the next morning, half an hour late, a meeting was already in progress. Through Timmer's open door he saw the whole complement of officers grouped around the colonel's desk.

Trying to move as inconspicuously as possible, he edged to the rear of the semicircle and peered in over Halloran's shoulders. "Sorry I'm late, sir."

"Forget it, boy," Timmer said with a strange, dispirited amiability. "I was just telling the men it doesn't pay to break your back to do a job, it doesn't pay to show 'em how a section should work. Our reward," he said miserably, "just came down from on high." He picked up a sheaf of documents. "The goddamn team is broken up. How do you like that?"

Brad didn't realize the full import of Timmer's bitter remarks until the man began to flip the pages disgustedly. "Crandall to II Corps, Oran . . . Marcus to OPD Plans, Washington . . . Halloran to AFHQ, Algiers——" He slapped the documents on the desk. "They're all yours, men. Come on and pick 'em out."

The officers closed in on the desk and rummaged eagerly among the documents. Each scanned the pages for his own name and then ran his eye down to see what his new duties would be.

Brad didn't go near the desk. He couldn't quite believe he might have to leave London and hesitated to make sure. He watched the other officers as they came away from the desk. Some were non-committal, most seemed disappointed. Ray Boyce waved his orders and winked happily. "Luck's holding, Brad. Free French liaison right here in dear old London. Me for the solid life. What did you draw?"

"I haven't looked."

He pushed through to the desk. Timmer, his chin resting on his fists, scowled about the room as if he was disgusted that no one had expressed regret at the breakup of the team.

"What happens to you, Colonel?"

"Me?" His voice dripped with indignation. "Operation burial, that's for me. I'm shifting downstairs to Movement Control."

Boyce and Timmer—both remaining in London! Brad reached hopefully for the last remaining set of orders on the desk and quickly ran his eyes over the top page. His orders were to report for duty to the G-3 section, Allied Force Headquarters, Algiers. Travel authorized by first available aircraft. Priority two.

His mind fell to Valerie. He scarcely heard Timmer's voice: "At least *you* feel it, Brad. I knew the minute I laid eyes on you you were a great team player. It's tough, boy."

He nodded briefly in Timmer's direction, not knowing quite what the man said, and walked out of the office to his desk. He wondered how he should break the news to her. There was

time. The first available aircraft certainly wouldn't be organized for a day or two.

It was delayed that long and three days longer, but he never managed to see Valerie to tell her. In the late editions of that day's evening papers, almost buried among the black headlines and detailed stories of the Anglo-American triumph in North Africa, a small item recorded the news that Brigadier Frederick Hassard Russell, C.B., D.S.O., M.C., had been found dead of a pistol wound in the head at his cottage in Burlingham. The chief constable, the story went on, stated that it was clearly a case of death by misadventure while the balance of the mind was disturbed.

The DC-4, loaded with some fifty American soldiers who sat in a bower of bedrolls, kit bags, rifles, a jumble of parachutes, and at least three guitars, climbed steeply and steadily through cloud for a long time. When they straightened out they were beneath a pale blue sky. Brad lit a cigarette, reclined against his overstuffed kit bag, and took Valerie's letter from his pocket.

She had written: "My dearest— The saddest of all duties is done and now I am back in my living room at 'Darjeeling.' I buried Father this morning. Looking back on it, to my memories of him as far distant as India, it seems that he really died two years ago in a place called St. Omer and only the great strength of his love for England carried him back for a spell so he could take a last look about before making it final.

"I had your sweet and troubling telegram yesterday, and my life was flung back suddenly into the old dreadful pattern. I'd forgotten how much I hated the war. Perhaps it is just as well that your news came to me yesterday, for in the presence of death it came easier than it would have otherwise. But that was yesterday. Now, sitting alone here, it is unbelievably hard to know you will not be in London when I return.

"I sometimes hate my own England. I sometimes think we have lived too long, we English, and are too content with our

own wisdom. I thought of it yesterday when I heard our coroner, Dr. Featherhulme, mumble the formula—death by misadventure while the balance of the mind was disturbed. I felt it was a poor tribute to a gallant soldier whose balance of mind was not at all disturbed. In the morning mail Father had received notice from the War Office that the medical board had turned him down for active service.

"I don't know what I shall do about 'Darjeeling.' I can't bear the thought of selling it. Of course Mala will come to London with me. I'll find a flat, with luck, where she can carry on. Dear Mala! The way she goes about the anguished business of clearing up after the dead, she is much more the tight-lipped Englishwoman than I will ever be.

"What more is there to say? The war is like the sea. We cannot know it or control it. We can only pray its moods and tides may be favorable to our fate. I love you, my darling, and I am desolate. Val."

He read the letter over and over again.

The sky was darkening. Beneath the plane's wing, he peered down the cliffside of a huge gray cloud. They were over the sea but not far out, for there were tiny ships bobbing on the whitecaps and barrage balloons weaving and straining from their decks in the squally weather.

He looked down at this last bit of England and remained glued to the window until a black cloud bank moved irrevocably beneath the wing like a curtain being drawn across a stage. This was the end, the end of England. As he turned from the window he felt himself the first Parker crying farewell as if this were his home, his haven, his country, and Malton something dim and unreal.

The Challenge

10

BRAD CAME upon the code name Overlord toward the end of a miserable winter in Algiers. Code names were in common use that winter in the G-3 section at Allied Force Headquarters; names like Operation Husky which, if all went well, would send the American Seventh and British Eighth armies cracking into Sicily, and like Baytown and Avalanche which embraced the more distant prospect of an invasion of the Italian mainland. But these were ordinary code names selected from an approved list and designed to cover a logical extension of operations in the Mediterranean.

Overlord was something apart. It hadn't appeared on any approved list and it was clearly removed from the Mediterranean theater of operations. Overlord was an enigma. Studying the word, he felt it had the sound and glow of *the big one*.

He pounced on the word each time it appeared thereafter. Eagerly and surreptitiously, as an enemy agent might, he examined the context for clues and portents and he fitted each flimsy detail into an imaginary frame of reference, hoping that a clear pattern would emerge. As the winter wore on, his clandestine groping became more important to him than his work on the communications desk, for it was not the war that concerned him, only the ungovernable tides of the war. Any operation which might conceivably carry him back to England was infused with magic.

He had come to hate Algiers quickly and violently. The city itself which gleamed so magnificently from its surrounding heights turned out, on closer inspection, to be rundown, discolored, and crowded. The civilians they had liberated from the

Nazi yoke proved neither gallant nor joyous; only cynical, dejected, and disgustingly commercial.

Even his duties fitted miserably into the pattern of that winter. The section was an integrated British-American group commanded by a happy, dissolute British colonel called Robey, who knew a cushy job when he had one and gloried in it. The section lacked spirit and challenge, and despite daily preachments from the top command the Americans openly resented the British and the latter suffered their parvenu brethren with a sort of tight-lipped condescension.

Almost at once Brad divorced himself from the rumbling unhappiness and withdrew into a secret existence of his own. He was billeted in a murky building called the Pension d'Alsace and here, after duty hours, he fell into the custom of drinking by himself, not to excess but so regularly that his monthly ration of two bottles of whisky and three of Algerian brandy scarcely met his needs. When he had made himself sufficiently warm and heady, he would dip his hand into a bureau drawer he had reserved for Valerie's letters, select one blindly, and settle down to read it as if it were newly arrived.

He played the little lottery almost every night and felt properly foolish, but the liquor helped a good deal. There was always something in her letters—a paragraph, a line, a phrase—that brought her wonderfully into the room.

On an evening balmy with the afterglow of an early spring sun, his telephone rang and a voice in an outrageous falsetto began, "Ees zeess you, Brad? Zeess ees Claire, cherie. You 'andsome Americaine, you 'ave been 'iding from your pover petite Claire. I 'ave 'ad zee police searching for you everywair in belle Algair, cherie . . ."

He listened with mounting annoyance and then suddenly, delightedly, he recognized the voice of Dan Stenick.

He had taken only a step or two into the overcrowded café

at the Hotel Aletti when Dan's stubby body fairly lunged at him from across the room. He thumped Brad's chest, threw an arm around his neck, and loosed a flood of affectionate profanities. Brad had to struggle free.

"Dan! I'm delighted to see you. What are you doing here and how the devil did you find me? Let's go get a drink."

Dan remained athwart the doorway. "Why, you good-lookin' bastard, you haven't changed a bit! How's the staff business? Jeez, I figured you for a general by now. Get *me*, bud."

He pretended to polish the captain's bars on his epaulet, but Brad had noticed something else. A Silver Star led off his row of territorial ribbons.

"That?" Dan cackled. "Between us, boy, it's a fakeroo. You heard, eh? After you left we jumped on Adak. What a frost! The Japs skedaddled couple weeks ahead and the colonel's got a face as long as your arm. So me and my boys we get sent out on patrol just to make sure they're gone and we have a dust-up with a few who were left behind. You never saw such scared little yella fellas in your life. We bring back six alive and kickin' and the colonel is so goddamn proud he's in a war he hits me with this here Silver Star. Do I care? It's the moolah that counts, boy." He made another gesture of polishing his captain's bars. "Remember Martinez? Well, he gets hung up in a tree and breaks a leg in three places comin' down and I get the company. What a racket! I tell you it's a swell goddamn war. I——"

Brad clapped a firm hand over his friend's mouth. "Hold it, boy! I've got to get a word in here. I want to know how you are and how a guy gets from Adak to Algiers. Okay. Talk."

"Talk he says! Who wants to screw around Adak? So I get me a transfer to the Rangers and they ship me all the way to here and tomorrow I move up. Place called Tunisia. Ever hear of it? Cap'n Stenick, sir, of the Rangers reportin' for duty." He fashioned a clownish salute.

For a while the drinks and Dan's rough, happy face filled Brad with a warm and wonderfully nostalgic feeling. But as Dan went on and on, Brad found his warm and wonderful

nostalgia turning into bitterness. Dan had an exasperating way of waving his freedom like a flag, at least that's the way Brad felt about it. He was free to live the war, free to fight and to make an ass of himself and even to die. He had always envied Dan his freedom but never as much as now.

"You know, Dan, you could've knocked me over with a feather when I heard you on the phone," Brad said finally. "I've been meaning to ask you. How did you know I was here?"

"How did I know?" Dan rubbed his chin. "How *did* I know? Jeez, I must be gettin' drunk." Suddenly he exploded. "Holy jumpin' Jerusalem! I must be outa my mind! I got a message for you!"

Brad put down his glass and tried to focus on his friend. "What message?"

"Jeez, I almost forgot too. I'm in Baltimore this one night 'cause we're sailin' in the mornin'. I say to myself I'll call Jane and see where that bum is, so I get put through to Malton and she seems pretty happy to hear from me and we talk awhile and she says 'Where you off to?' and I say 'North Africa' and suddenly she's cryin' or somethin', anyway she's all choked up, and I say hello hello and then she tells me you're in Algiers and she says 'Will you do me a favor, Dan?' and I say 'Sure, doll' and she chokes up again and then she says 'Tell him I love him' and that's the message except I can't tell you the way it came through over the wire, kind of got me right between the eyes the way she said it, 'Tell him I love him.' I tell you, boy, that gal sure goes for you. We better drink to Jane. Bottoms up on this one for sure."

Brad pushed back his head and drank his drink. The ceiling spun about, but his mind was startlingly clear.

So she knew. It wasn't possible, but she knew. It couldn't be, but it was. She knew. *Tell him I love him.* Janie wouldn't say that to her closest friend. She wouldn't say that to her own father. *Tell him I love him.* She would never say such a thing to Dan Stenick. To Dan of all people. *But she did.* That's how he knew she knew. Now he could see perfectly why she knew.

The letters he had sent her riffled through his mind and of course it must have been perfectly obvious to her.

There was another drink placed on the table and he reached for it. He wondered if it was good or bad that she knew. He made a snap decision. It was bad. It was bad because she was hurt. He shuddered to think she was hurt. He loved Janie in a very special way. Hell, one couldn't live three years with a girl as fine as Janie without shuddering to think she was hurt in the most vulnerable way a girl like Janie could be hurt. It was a bad thing because the time hadn't yet come. Perhaps the time would never come. Perhaps she need never have known. He might even be killed. *The war will make it right. God alone knows how, but the war will make it right.* It was a bad thing that Janie knew.

They drank and after a while Brad said, "I've been thinking of asking for a transfer to some other outfit." He was lying. He had just thought about it.

"What outfit?"

"Outfit like yours."

"Nuts. With the doll and all back home you got to be crazy to go stickin' your neck out."

"I'd like a shot at a fighting outfit again."

"It's the liquor talkin', boy."

Brad thought, It's the liquor talking all right, and then again maybe it isn't. *The war will make it right.* But I'm not in the war. I'm not gambling. I'm getting a free ride. There's no balance in this thing. No balance at all. I haven't earned Valerie. I haven't earned the right to hurt Janie.

In this single drunken blistering moment it was all perfectly clear. He said, "I'm serious, Dan."

"You're bein' ridic'ulous. They need you where they got you."

The light hurt his eyes and made his head go around. He wasn't so drunk not to know he was very drunk. It was the liquor talking. He had no intention of volunteering for the Rangers. God knew he wasn't a coward, but God also knew he was in love with Valerie and she was in love with him and all he wanted was to get back to England.

AS SEPTEMBER passed slow panic began to take a grip on Brad. Everybody knew the war was approaching its climax. Sicily and south Italy had been conquered; the Fifth Army had won the bloody battle of Salerno and was spilling over the slopes of Vesuvius into the plain of Naples. Overlord was no longer a mystery.

In Colonel Robey's section, certain officers and non-coms had quietly disappeared and it was an open secret that they had been transferred to COSSAC, the planning headquarters for the great D-day assault. COSSAC was an abbreviation, not a code name; it betokened the chief of staff to the supreme Allied commander. The supreme Allied commander hadn't been appointed yet, but everybody figured he was going to be General Marshall.

By the end of the month Brad, torn between frantic hope and a premonition he might be overlooked, watched for an opportunity to put his case to Colonel Robey. It came one day after lunch. He saw the colonel humming contentedly on his way back from A-mess and he followed him into his office.

He felt he had picked the right day. The colonel's wine-stained lips clucked happily as he peered at the solemn young lieutenant standing at attention.

"You look like a very sad owl, Parker. I feel a problem coming on. For God's sake, sit down. Don't be so bloody formal!"

Brad thought the man was feeling extraordinarily good. He made his request for a transfer to COSSAC as brief as possible.

The colonel seemed amused. "None of my business of course, but I can't fathom why the devil anybody'd want a transfer to England. Long on rain, short on beef, no whisky to speak of, old boy. Can't fathom it at all." He spread his mouth in a wide, pleasant grimace. "Girl?"

Brad had long since prepared his reply. "It's Overlord, Colonel. As long as it's coming off I'd like to have a finger in that pie—if it's at all possible. Frankly, sir, the whole conception of Overlord excites me." He felt he sounded shamefully

convincing. He was lying well and he had never been a liar. "I'd consider it a great personal favor if you could work it for me, Colonel."

The westbound troopships moved across the harbor almost every day now. Brad could see them lying at anchor far out beyond the anti-submarine nets as the refueling ships moved among them. It seemed that everybody was going back for Overlord, everybody except him.

One afternoon early in October a lieutenant called Glass, who worked in the code room at G-3, came in from the harbor and made for Brad's desk. He had been distributing a code change among troop commanders on the ships of a Clyde-bound convoy. He said, "Ran into a friend of yours out there, fellow called Stenick. He said to say hello. The convoy's not sailing till midnight if you want to run out. I think I can get you on the cutter."

Brad didn't go out. He didn't want to see anyone who was sailing to England, not even Dan.

The orders came through two weeks later. Colonel Robey handed him the stapled sheaf of documents.

"Congratulations, Parker. I see you made it."

"I'll be sorry to leave your section, sir."

Robey laughed. "In a pig's eye but it's decent of you to say so. How would you like to go by aircraft?"

"I'd prefer it, Colonel."

"Good. I've got something to send to the War Office. I'll give you a pouch. Courier means priority one."

"That's very thoughtful of you, sir."

12

V ALERIE didn't want to leave the city even for a few hours but there was no way out of it. Viscount Haltram had pleaded with her to come to Smallhill for dinner. The car would

have to return to the city in any case and it seemed a pity, he had said, for her to miss this opportunity of seeing John's home. He had added that it would be a great comfort to him, and this was when she had found she couldn't disappoint the frail old man, not on the proud and tragic day he had received from his King the V.C. his eldest son Derek had died to win.

So, on this gray afternoon in late October she found herself with John's father and his younger brother Bertie riding out to Tunbridge Wells in an ancient Rolls Royce provided by the War Ministry.

The trees were bare and there was frost on the fields. She thought bitterly about journeying southward on this of all days. It was not that she suspected for a moment Brad might arrive. Yesterday's cable had merely said he was on his way; of course he wasn't allowed to specify how or when. She knew it would be days at the very earliest, more probably weeks if he traveled by ship. But simply being in London and knowing the telephone *could* ring was exquisite excitement. It was a terrible time to be driving to Kent. And to John's home of all places!

The day had been mournful. Sitting in a gold and crimson hall in Buckingham Palace she had watched John's father clasp his bony hands as he heard a court chamberlain read the citation for a posthumous award of the Victoria Cross to Lieutenant Colonel the Hon. Derek Edward Fothergill Wynter, Royal Dragoon Guards, for valor above and beyond the call of duty.

Now they were speeding along a country road, capriciously it seemed, in the rich high-bodied old Rolls Royce with a stubby corporal immobile at the wheel.

Viscount Haltram hadn't spoken since leaving the palace. He sat almost lost in the car's lush upholstery and his face was exceedingly sad. He held the tiny brown box containing his son's medal in both hands ceremoniously.

The car passed through Tunbridge Wells and made a sharp turn into a side road and then another into a tree-lined lane.

Viscount Haltram said, "John is well."

She said, "Yes. I had a letter yesterday."

"I had one too. Quite a time ago though. I think it was when he heard about Derek. A very good letter. Is he still in Sicily?"

Poor John, she thought. He had left Sicily a month ago. His Commandos had fought through Potenza and Foggia and his father didn't even know. She said, "He's on the east coast of Italy."

The old man said, "You'd think they'd send him home—now."

As soon as the car turned into an old stone gateway she understood violently a great many things she had not fully understood before. The great sweep of lawn was covered with dead leaves. The mansion itself looked gray and cheerless. The windows were crevices in heavy stone walls, almost all of them boarded over.

She looked at the remote old man and the strewn lawn and the gray building and she remembered how John would come to "Darjeeling" on his leaves. He was the elder son now, heir to all this cheerlessness. She wanted to weep for poor, sweet John and for herself because she was faithless to him.

When the car pulled up, the great front door was opened by a tiny girl who could not have been more than fourteen. The man they called Elson came and helped Lord Haltram off with his coat. He was bald and old and enormously fat. Lord Haltram opened the box and showed him the medal.

"Bertie," Viscount Haltram said, still gazing at the medal, "take Miss Russell into the study." He snapped the box shut. "I'll be down after I've put this away." He walked uneasily, like a man lost, across the dank, dim hall to a staircase.

The study proved a pleasant relief. It was a good-sized room made warm and intimate by shelves of books lined solidly along the walls and by the fire which snapped with fresh kindling.

Bertie poured sherry and said, "Well, here's to you, Val. Decent of you to come out. Damn good turn."

"Bless you, Bertie. I'm glad to be of some use."

"Father was keen on it," Bertie said. He lit a cigarette and blinked his eyes at the fire and said, "Now that Derek's bought

it I rather imagine he thinks a bit about John. Can't think of Derek dead. Not because he was my brother, mind, but he was splendid. Had it all."

She said, "V.C.s don't come along every day," but she was thinking of Bertie's easy familiarity. She wondered what John had written them over the last year that they should take so much for granted.

She looked about the room and she heard Bertie say, "Oh, it's not that bad, Val. The place could do with a bit of fixing but you'd be amazed how cheerful it can be in summer." She felt as if she had been caught cheating.

"I wasn't thinking about Smallhill," she said, and she added brightly, "I'm only now beginning to thaw out. Do tell me about the lads at Biggin Hill. They're quite legendary, you know."

"Grand bunch," Bertie said. "Of course our lot are pretty much parvenus. The old chaps, the Battle of Britain boys, those that are left, are pretty much scattered now." He poured another sherry and said carelessly, "God, I hope John makes it nicely. I mean, I'd hate to have all this shoved at me someday. Not my cup of tea at all. John's made for it. He'll never be Derek of course, but he's awfully settled—you'd know about that better than any of us."

Relief came to her with the opening of the study door. Viscount Haltram took a sherry and went to a chair which was clearly his, for it fitted him perfectly. His face became relaxed and he seemed able to coax a little brightness into it.

He said, "I suppose Bertie has been chipping away at your patience."

"She's been grand, Father. Super."

The old man glanced at his son. "I haven't heard a proper English sentence from him since he joined the air force. I gather however that Bertie approves of you. May I call you Valerie?"

That's the way it was through another round of sherry and then at dinner. She was being clearly appraised as the next Lady Haltram.

They dined in a large square room which gave the impression

of being dusty, probably because it was so empty. The table, chairs, and a sideboard were lost in the vast expanse. Afterwards somewhere in the journey between the dining room and the study for coffee, Bertie made off. She knew it was no accident when the old man began to talk about her father and how much John respected him.

Then he was suddenly sad. He said, "To say I am grateful to you is to put it poorly. It is much more than that."

"Grateful for what, Lord Haltram?"

He closed his eyes a moment as if it was a hard confession to make. "It would be easier for you to understand if you had known Derek. He was not at all like me. He was strong and he had the face and bearing of a leader. I had always looked to him to give the line new vigor. It's a fine old title, you see, and a hundred years ago it produced fine men for England and I was certain Derek would restore something of its glory."

The old man looked away remorsefully. "But Derek is dead, and now I see a great many things clearly that never occurred to me before. I used to wonder why John joined the Commandos and how he came to win his decorations. Now I sometimes think he went to war in order to die, and if he is not dead it is because you, my dear Valerie, have given him a reason for living."

She thought, Oh God, why did I let myself come here? Brad—Brad—not by ship, please not by ship. Come by air—come quickly—come rescue me from my own country that is torn and sad. I don't want to live for the past and die for the past. Come quickly and bring your strength and your love to help me fight the dust and ashes and barren urges. I am a person, not a nation. A life. A being. Come quickly, Brad, with your strong American face, your vigor, your joy.

The old man was saying, "I understand that certain privileges accrue to a parent who has a V.C. as a substitute for a son and I have suggested that John be transferred to some less hazardous duty. He was never robust. God alone knows how he gathered up the strength and courage to carry on as he has."

There was nothing she could say. She watched the old man turn abruptly and take a long time at the coffee urn. Then Bertie mercifully knocked on the study door, opened it a crack, and said that the Rolls had to report back at the Ministry before 2300 hours.

"You'd better get cracking, Val," he said, and she was glad that the light in the hall was dim because it made it so much easier to say good-by.

The air was chill and heavy with fog, but she opened a window of the Rolls and breathed deeply. From the deep seat of the Rolls it seemed as if the corporal up front were steering through pitch-blackness. It didn't matter. Nothing mattered as long as Smallhill was left behind.

The fog swirled around the open window and she thought Brad's plane couldn't land anywhere in the south of England even if he *had* taken off from Africa. But he couldn't have taken off. She had listened to too many Americans at the club recount the weary days of waiting at Algiers.

The corporal said, "I think you'd better put up that window, ma'am. Fog's comin' in good and heavy."

He turned on full headlights and slowed the huge car. The fog grew thicker.

Suppose he had arrived. Suppose he had emplaned when he sent the cable. He would have flown overnight and would have landed today.

In the open country the fog had swirled and spun in the gleam of the headlights, but now it hung low and thick and dirty yellow. They were in the city. The car barely crawled along and from time to time the corporal stopped, looked about, and pushed forward again.

The car was crawling past an Underground and the station name shone fuzzy in the dense fog: Elephant & Castle.

"Please wait a moment, Corporal!"

She was out of the car and bounding down the steps of the Underground, rummaging in her purse for three pennies, and

when she got into a booth her trembling fingers dialed a wrong number twice before Mala's voice came on the phone.

Mala said, "I'm so glad you called. I was worried about the fog and how you'll ever get in." There was a pause. "A post-office telegram arrived about an hour ago."

"From whom? What does it say?"

"I haven't opened it."

"Oh, Mala!"

The servant was an interminable time. At last a rustle of paper came on the line and Mala said severely, "It reads *Happiest landing of my life* and then it says, *At last darling arrive Euston Station 10:57 tonight all my love*, and it's signed by someone called Brad."

There were so many questions she wanted to ask. Where was it sent from? When was it handed in? But there was no time. She closed the phone and was almost at the ticket booth when she remembered the Rolls. She flew to the stairs and up into the street and for a confused moment she couldn't see the Rolls but there it was at the curb all the time. She couldn't think of what to say, so she said, "Thank you very much, Corporal," and dashed back down the stairs.

She couldn't remember ever waiting so long for a train. But it came at last and she closed her eyes and counted between stops because it seemed to make the train go faster. She thanked God for the fog. Railway trains were always late in the fog, often two or three hours late, especially the trains from the Midlands. She couldn't bear not being there when he arrived. She looked at her watch. It was nearly midnight. She prayed for the fog to come down heavy and the train to be late.

The next stop was Warren Street and the next would be Euston. It seemed a long way. The Underground train roared on and on. She thought of Brad's face and she couldn't believe she was about to see him. The train roared on and she closed her eyes and then she heard the wheels squealing on the curve of the rails turning into Euston and the brakes being applied.

She dashed ahead of the others across the concourse of the

dun-colored old station to the arrival bulletin and she saw at once that the train due at ten fifty-seven (from Manchester, Crewe, and Dunstable) had not yet arrived. She stood there panting, her eyes glued to the magic words in chalk *Retarded—due about 1 A.M.*

She saw him the moment the doors all along the train burst open. He stood framed in the door in the second carriage back, a kit bag slung over his shoulder and a suitcase in his hand. Then the passengers, mostly troops, spilled out over the platform and she lost sight of him. She didn't know quite how she found him in the swarm of people moving in a counterdirection to where she wanted to go. She didn't know anything except that she felt his hard, strong body pressed against her. They kissed blindly and she dug her chin into his shoulder and her cheek was against his.

After a time he drew away and held her off at half arm's length. She blinked her moist, shining eyes and his mouth went a little open in wonderment of her face. They kissed and he caught her up again, hard. He said, "I'm home, Val. I'm home, I'm home."

She said, "Of course, my darling, of course. You're home."

13

IT WAS late on a cold gray afternoon in January and the sirens had just wailed an alert. In the huge room which contained COSSAC's liaison sections, the siren had had no effect. Its wail had merely overridden the clatter of typewriters and mimeograph machines being worked by uniformed girls in a fenced-off segment outside the private offices of the generals and the admirals.

When the siren died out, the captain at the desk next to Brad's said, "Damn! It'll be hell getting a taxi and I've got to pick up a gal at the Embassy."

Brad turned around to make a rejoinder and that was when he caught sight of two men coming down the aisle between the desks toward the private offices.

One of them was Dan Stenick. The other was a tall, big-boned British captain of marines. Dan's face was stern, his chin high, and for a moment Brad thought he was going to pass right on through. Then, as if nudged by a telepathic signal, he turned his head impulsively and his mouth dropped open in delight and amazement.

Brad saw that his temples had become flecked with gray, his face had lost some of its roundness, and his eyes seemed deeper and more meaningful. An oak leaf gleamed on his Silver Star and two new battle stars had been added to his African ribbon.

But he apparently hadn't changed inside. He whipped his hand into Brad's with a smack which caused heads to be raised all over the huge room.

"It's the printer! Jeez, boy, I'm glad to see you. Imagine runnin' into you like this. How long you been here, you bastard?"

They talked for a moment or two and then Dan turned to glance at the British marine, who was already inside the gate near the private offices and motioning him to hurry. He said, "Got to get in there, boy. Wait for me, hear? Won't be more'n a couple minutes. Jeez, this is great, kiddo." He hurried to rejoin his companion and both disappeared into the office of Commodore Turner.

Brad dropped his paper work. He reflected on the gray at Dan's temples, on the oak leaf and the battle stars, and the hard, firm-fleshed, wind-burned handsomeness a man's face takes on when he's conditioned for combat, and it occurred to him that Dan was a symbol of the war he had left home to fight and of the warrior he had set out to be.

They remained in Commodore Turner's office a good deal longer than a couple of minutes, as Brad guessed they would. He felt sorry for them.

Commodore Minton Turner was notorious at COSSAC for

being chronically unable to explain anything to anybody in less than twenty minutes, and when he had to refuse a request it usually took a full hour.

His problem was landing craft. At the dawn of 1944 people back home envisioned the year of decision in terms of immense armies driving the foe relentlessly across the hedgerows of France, but the field commanders dreamed their rosier dreams in terms of ugly little ships which could drop a ramp on a hostile beach. Landing craft were in short supply; landing craft were the bottleneck in every plan, the chip on every general's shoulder.

In these circumstances, Commodore Turner, who was in the chain for allocation of landing craft to units in training, was the perfect man for the job. When unit commanders or their deputies came storming at him with the irrefutable argument that they couldn't rehearse assault landings without landing craft, he spoke slowly and precisely of production complications in the shipyards. His entrapped listeners, bored beyond belief but unable to become angered at this earnest, plodding man, usually fled his office determined never again to try to jump the gun on rehearsal craft.

Now it was more than an hour. The outer office was empty except for Brad and the men who had drawn night duty. The alert still hung on. Distant and sporadic anti-aircraft fire faintly penetrated the blackout curtains. He found himself unable to concentrate on his current job which was to summarize into two pages a thirty-page study of the weight of Sherman tanks in relation to the stress limit of French bridges between Utah beach and Carentan. He put the reports away and fell to thinking about Valerie.

He wouldn't see her until late. It was her first free day since the news came that John Wynter was missing, and she had gone to Smallhill to spend it with Viscount Haltram. He loved her all the more for it, for the quick, intuitive compassion that made her true and lovely, inside and out. But he missed her, even for the few hours. He hoped she would take an early train back.

Once more a sound of distant cannonading came into the

room. He found it a comforting sound. *The war will make it right* she had said. The war had made it right, at least for her. They had always shared the gnawing hurt of conflicting loyalties; though it was unspoken it intensified their dependence one upon the other and added a sense of clandestine magic to the simple joy of being together. Now she was free. Their delicately balanced little world had gone off balance and the duty of putting it right was his alone. That duty was coming up to challenge him sooner than he expected.

"Holy jumpin' Jerusalem! Another minute an' I'd go clean off my rocker!" After an hour and a quarter with Commodore Turner, Dan had come staggering toward Brad's desk, feigning abject weakness.

Brad said, "You were lucky. He sometimes goes twice as long. You shouldn't come nuzzling around for an LCI."

"Who said anything about an LCI?"

"That's what you saw him for, isn't it?"

Dan scratched his head. "Maybe. Got a bar in this morgue?"

"Top floor."

"Say, boy, this is Captain Waller." The British marine captain had come up behind Dan. "Call him Jeff. Brad Parker—old buddy from way back. Okay, let's go get a quick one."

The Britisher, who wore two rows of decorations on his battle-dress jacket, gave an appearance of such bruising toughness that Dan seemed almost delicate by comparison. Brad noticed that both men wore the same sleeve patch, the rifle and anchor design of Combined Operations.

He asked, puzzled, "You both in the same outfit?"

Dan said, "Betcha. We're gettin' up a real outfit. Breakfast time Jeff pours a bag of nails in his cornflakes so he can chew good." He chuckled. "Where's the drink, kiddo?"

"Wait a minute. You fellows are kidding me. What do you mean—the same outfit? You're still with the Rangers, aren't you?"

"Sure," Dan said carelessly. "Come on, boy. One drink. We

got to get goin'. We got a colonel who burns your back teeth if you don't report."

Brad took his coat and cap and led the men up a staircase to the top floor. After their passes had been scrutinized, he brought them into COSSAC's pride and joy.

What had once been the austere board room of Lloyd's Bank was now an officers' club dominated by a fancy bar and complete with the irreverent accouterments of a happy drinking place. It was crowded with chattering men and women of all services in the D-day triumvirate, and though waitresses ran their unceasing errands between the bar and the tables, the talk was uninhibited, much of it about the most priceless and dreadful secret in all the world. Words like *Neptune*, *Mulberry*, *Juno*, and *Omaha*, hallowed words in the D-day hierarchy, were spattered about in the lively conversation.

Dan and his British comrade, their faces tweaking with incredulity, kept looking about the noisy room.

Brad was enjoying himself hugely. Finally he said, "You fellows feel you can talk freely now?"

"I'll tell you, boy," Dan said uncertainly, "we got an outfit you won't find listed in the order of battle. It's a special force."

"Oh, one of those." Brad knew of all kinds of specially trained and semi-independent units being organized for D-day. There were the air-borne scheduled to drop inland six hours in advance of H-hour, marine engineers going in at H-hour minus thirty minutes to remove submerged obstacles from the beach approaches, and certain small units assigned the task of making a furtive visit to the D-day beaches a full week in advance in order to scoop up samples of sand for technical study by the tank people. He said, "What's so mysterious about it?"

Dan said, "You got your security system. We got ours. What about these waitresses? They staff officers in disguise? Set up a conference for me, boy. Any time."

Brad explained COSSAC's security system with a certain appetite. All COSSAC personnel were proud of the experiment made by the shrewd, cheerful, and daring British general who

organized the headquarters, pending the arrival of the supreme commander.

"The general called together everybody who works in this building. And I mean everybody—cooks, waitresses, janitors, window cleaners, as well as the brass and all the rest of us and spilled the works about Overlord. Simple as that. Everybody's on their honor."

"In our mess," Dan chuckled, "we can't put a calendar on the wall 'cause it says 1944 and that's a breach of security."

Brad asked, "Are you H-hour?"

"Ahead."

"Jumping?"

Dan shook his head. "Uh—uh."

Brad whistled. "One of those."

"Yas," Waller grunted, looking about with a derisive grin. "Ours is a proper do."

It was a proper do all right, Brad thought. The estimated casualties for pre-H-hour operations on the beaches ran as high as seventy per cent for the marine engineers and only slightly less for certain special units assigned to destroy heavy German emplacements which had already been photographed and pinpointed.

Waller swallowed the last of his drink. "Fine whisky, Parker," he said, and then to Dan: "Come on. Get cracking."

"Jeez, boy," Dan said, "we're movin' outa town tomorrow. Goddamn trainin' area." He turned around to Waller. "No reason why he can't come down to our mess for a drink."

The marine shrugged. "Your responsibility. No skin off my fanny."

They went downstairs and signed out. In St. James's Square it was cold and drizzly and black. Waller drove the jeep. They screeched around Hyde Park Corner and drove along deserted streets deep into Kensington. Waller made a sharp turn off Old Brompton Road and came to a halt near a dwelling which even in the darkness seemed to stand whole amid the burned-out ruins of its neighbors. It had not, however, es-

caped punishment. A pathway to the door ran through rubble and in the hall the wall plaster had crumbled to the floor. What was once a living room contained only an unpainted wooden table and a few chairs. The window frames were roughly boarded over on the inside.

Dan called out, "Carson!" and a soldier wearing a white houseman's coat over British battle dress clattered into the room. "Carson, any whisky left?"

"A bit, sir."

"Three then. Mark it up to me. The colonel still here?"

"Yes, sir. He's been asking for you and Captain Waller."

"Okay. Get the drinks." Dan turned to Waller. "Why don't you go in and tell the old man?"

"We were both sent."

Dan said, "What the hell. There's nothin' to report. We got the ol' run-around. Tell him I'm entertainin' a hostage from Cossac."

Waller thought it over dubiously for a moment, then walked briskly to a door off the far wall of the room, knocked on it, and entered.

Dan motioned Brad to a chair. "How you like this setup? Crummy, eh? We been here three weeks organizin' the outfit. Three weeks in this dump's enough. I'm glad we start trainin' tomorrow."

Brad said, "What's Waller doing in it?"

"We're going to have some Canadians too. It's a three-way deal, this one. A beaut."

Brad said, "If it's a pre-H-hour deal, it must be cleaning out beach obstacles. You don't want to talk about the mission?"

Dan grimaced. "I can't, tootsie. You got your security system and we got ours, and the guy who laid down the law he's real buggy on the subject——" He thumbed toward the colonel's door and clapped his mouth shut. Waller was coming out.

The marine grabbed his drink, waved it around, and took a big swallow. He said, "The old man wants to see you *and* your friend. Better hop to it. He's burning."

He should have known, Brad thought. There could only be one such colonel in the whole of the Allied Expeditionary Force. It fell into his laggard awareness even as he was clicking his heels at the threshold and saluting. A pot of coffee sat steaming on the desk. There spun into his mind a distinct association with the pair of enormous shoulders, the muscular neck, and shiny black hair, and before the colonel twisted his scowling face around Brad knew he was Alex Timmer.

The scowl melted on the hard, handsome face. Timmer said, "Talk to you in a minute, Brad," and then the face stormed up again. "All right, Dan. You know the orders. What have you got to say?"

Dan said slowly, "You know Lieutenant Parker, sir?"

"Do you know the orders?"

"I figured, Colonel, an officer from Cossac was safe enough."

"Nobody's safe enough!" The sound of the gruff monotone filled Brad with nostalgia as if 1942 had transpired in his far, far youth. "I thought I laid that down in orders. Nobody's safe enough and I don't give a good God damn who it is. How do you figure you know who's safe enough? By God, I'm not sure I shouldn't kick you out. We've got months of training ahead of us. Security's going to get tougher. We're not even started and here you waltz a man in just because he's wearing a uniform. I tell you, Dan, this is your last goof. Next time you won't know what hit you till you land up at a court-martial. Understood?"

"Yes, sir."

The hard, square face relaxed abruptly. "You're a lucky soldier. If you had to fumble, you fumbled with the one man I know I can trust. But it doesn't excuse you. Now get out and let me have a word with Lieutenant Parker."

Dan heeled and toed a precise turn, gave Brad a hidden thumbs-up sign, and marched out of the room.

The colonel put his hands over his eyes and rubbed them gently. "Sit down, Brad. Have a smoke. I'm damned glad to see you."

Nothing had changed, Brad observed. Having played the hard-bitten professional, Timmer had now fallen back on another old stand-by, the careworn commander. Nothing at all had changed, not even the silver medallion on his epaulet.

Timmer must have noticed the same thing about Brad. He brought his hands from his eyes and said, "No promotion? How long have you been at Cossac?"

"I got back from the Med end of October, Colonel."

"Still wrestling paper, eh? That's the way it goes. It's murder unless you're from the Point. Got to explode yourself out. I hammered. By God, I hammered! And finally I've got what I want."

He lit a cigarette and snorted two sharp streams of smoke from his nostrils. "This is one they can't take away from me. It's an independent force. No higher echelons around here. No generals to grab the credit. When the balloon goes up this outfit will be playing for keeps. And when it's over I'll be right up there with the best of them or I'll be dead." He chuckled. "No wonder they gave me the job. Only a crazy coot like Alex Timmer would go for it."

Brad saw an opportunity he had been looking for. He said, "If Dan Stenick is typical of your outfit, you're in the clear, Colonel. They don't come better than Dan. He's a born fighter. We trained together at Harrison."

Timmer said, "Clowns a lot but he's all right. Not the best but all right. I've got a Canadian who gave up a majority to come in with us as a captain just because this is his kind of a fight. And there's Jeff Waller. You met Jeff. Twenty-three raids with the Commandos and he's never killed a German with a bullet. Always a knife or his bare hands. Got a couple more good tough officers reporting tomorrow at the training area. Interviewed hundreds. This is for the type of man who wants nothing except to get in there and fight, and the hotter the better. Nice seeing you again, Brad. Tell Stenick to give you a set of coordinates for the training area and be sure to drop by if you're in the neighborhood. Always glad to see you."

On his way home by Underground Brad reflected on his interview with Timmer. He knew that Timmer in his curious, inverted way had offered him a job in a tough, fighting outfit. He had no intention of volunteering for the job but the offer made him feel better about himself. He couldn't wait to see Valerie.

She telephoned as soon as the train from Tunbridge Wells had pulled into Victoria Station. He met her at the Green Park Underground and they dashed through the drizzle to a small French restaurant off Curzon Street.

The waiter was slow bringing her a gin and orange. When it came she drank it eagerly, speaking not a word until she had finished it. She put down the glass and reached across the tiny table for his hand.

She said, "Better, darling. Much better. I'm coming out of it now. Don't let me go back to Smallhill. Ever. It was a dreadful nightmare. The poor old man keeps wandering about the place as if he's lost in a woods. My visit wasn't a good idea, it wasn't at all."

He said, "They've had no definite word."

She gave a brief shake of her head. "Nothing. His name hasn't come up on a PW list and the Red Cross in Geneva is a blank. But of course the raid was over a river . . ." She didn't complete the thought. They sat in silence for a little while and gradually her fingers relaxed.

On January 17 of that year of hope and glory, a new sense of purpose surged through Norfolk House. General Eisenhower arrived to claim his command and by the very act of his arrival, COSSAC became SHAEF: Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force.

The supreme commander, walking briskly through the offices of Norfolk House by way of showing himself to all hands, failed fortunately to notice that one officer in liaison remained seated during the brief inspection. Brad hadn't heard the sharp com-

mand heralding the arrival of the party, and it wasn't until an unaccustomed scuff of many boots clattered past his desk that he looked about and found himself the only person not standing stiffly at attention. By that time it was too late. The supreme commander and his staff had already moved into another section.

He hadn't heard the command because another event far more important to him had burst in on that startling day.

When Brad himself had arrived at Norfolk House that morning an urgent message to call Valerie awaited him. Her voice on the telephone had sounded tearful and excited. A stick of type in the *Daily Telegraph* (though the bulk of the reportage from Italy dealt with the fierce battle for Monte Cassino) described how a patrol of the 4th Indian Division, reconnoitering an abandoned farmhouse near San Leonardo, had found the survivors of a missing British raid party and among them its commander, Major the Hon. John Wynter. They were wounded and wasting but still alive and the Indians carried them back through three miles of disputed territory into British lines.

14

THE day the challenge came was damp and gusty, as what day isn't in London in February. Approaching along the corridor to his apartment, Brad gained the impression that one of Ray's spontaneous parties had erupted, but when he opened the door he found it was merely that Dan had come to London on leave and had dropped in unexpectedly. He had often wondered how it would be when two happy extroverts like Ray Boyce and Dan Stenick were brought together. Now he knew.

"Say, boy," Dan called out in lieu of a greeting, "Ray here and me, we're arguin' about Timmer——"

Ray cut in. "There's no argument. He's a bum."

"Tough—sure. But there's nothin' he asks us to do he don't do himself. Yesterday we did a five-mile hike with big pack and he was up front on his two hind legs—not in a jeep like some colonels I know. You go find me a colonel like that."

Ray said, "He's still a bum. I know Timmer from way back. He's out for personal profit and that's no way to go to war."

Brad scarcely listened. He sat in a corner, clear of the cross fire, and his drink warmed in his hand. Twice over the din of the argument he thought he heard footsteps in the outside corridor, but when he went to the door he found it was his imagination.

Valerie had gone from the Red Cross club by the time he called there for her. She had left a message with the girl called Edna that she would come directly to the flat as soon as she was free. He wondered where she could be.

More than a month now had passed since the news of John's rescue. In a field hospital near Bari he had recovered from the worst of his wounds and he was being invalided home full of honors—a bar to his D.S.O. and promotion to lieutenant colonel having been the rewards for saving himself and the remnants of his raid party. Brad wondered if he had already arrived, if this was why she had left the club unexpectedly.

It had been a sensitive month for her, he felt. She had spoken very little about John. Only once had he asked her what would happen when John came back. She had pressed her finger across his lips before he could complete the query and had said, "Let me find the way. I promised him a long time ago I would wave him welcome when he came home. This I must do, my darling—and afterward, let me find the way. You do understand. Tell me you understand."

Of course he understood. He hadn't become so calloused he couldn't understand that a man coming home from the war should be met and have matters explained. But, if she had really left the club to meet John, he wished she had told him.

The music on the radio faded out and a precise reading of the

six o'clock news began, creating a temporary armistice in the battle between Ray and Dan. Then, as the news was succeeded by Glenn Miller's band playing "Tuxedo Junction," Brad thought he heard footsteps in the corridor. He darted to the door. This time they were real and they were Valerie's.

"Did you wonder, darling?" she said. She kissed him and shook her dripping umbrella in the hallway. "I hope you did. I've just spent the most wonderful two hours at Brown's Hotel. And with a man. I know it does sound dreadful. Did I ever mention Mr. Tamarga to you? Anton Tamarga. He was my father's solicitor in Calcutta and he's just come to London. A delicious little old man, half brown, and he speaks the most beautiful English and he knew my mother. That's the wonderful thing, darling. He knew my mother and he spent the whole tea-time telling me about her."

Inside the living room Dan twisted his stubby frame sideways so he could see what was going on in the vestibule.

"What's this, Ray?"

"This," Ray said, lifting his eyebrows significantly, "is it."

Dan strained for a closer look. "Is she real?"

He whistled a low, meaningful whistle and rose slowly as they came into the room. He had been drinking and perhaps his eyes were playing tricks, but he thought he had never seen a more glowingly beautiful woman.

The gusts that beat through the streets of London also buffeted a hospital plane holding to the strict approach pattern for the southwest coast of England. A nursing sister, who was seated near the tail end, unbuckled her safety belt and walked slowly along the narrow passage between bunks which were lashed by chains against the fuselage. She paused at each bunk and said something to the man who lay in it and smiled at those who could see her.

The plane was bumping hard when she got back to her seat and she dropped into it and pulled the safety belt taut. There

were only two seats near the tail end of the plane. The other was occupied by John Wynter. He was bundled up in a heavy scarf and a British warm.

She said, "It's a horribly long trip from Gib. I hate it."

He nodded. "Longer by ship though. Pity about the weather. It would be nice to see the old country stretched out below."

"Have you been away long, sir?"

"About twenty months."

He leaned his head against the back of the seat and closed his eyes. The nursing sister frowned as she studied his face, which was thin and sickly yellow. She said, "We've still almost forty minutes, Colonel. Hadn't you better go back and take a lie down?"

His eyes came open abruptly. "Don't mention it, Sister. Don't you dare. I'm not going to encourage some miserable M.O. to bung me off to a hospital for the weekend. Not this weekend anyway."

"I hate having colonels as patients. Other ranks are so much easier. They do as they're told."

He smiled and passed his hand over the insignia on the epaulet of his British warm. "I'll say this, Sister. I'm the newest lieutenant colonel you'll ever nurse. I think they handed me this extra pip as a sort of going-away present." The smile faded gradually from his pallid face. "I *will* get past the M.O. at the field, won't I?"

She said, "I know why they gave you the extra pip. For the same reason they gave you a bar to your D.S.O. If you do as I say you *might* get past the M.O. at Croydon."

"You sound desperately interesting."

She handed him a pill and a cup of water. "This has codeine. It should give you a nice lift by the time we land, especially if you relax as much as possible."

He swallowed the pill. Then he said, "You're really very good to me. I suppose there'll be transport at the field."

"Transport to where, Colonel?"

"The West End."

She said, "If nothing else is available, I'm sure one of the ambulances will drop you off. Most of the lads are bound for East Grinstead. But don't forget, you've got to get past the M.O. first."

After a time the plane steadied itself and he tried to doze as the nursing sister had instructed. She thought he was the youngest lieutenant colonel she had ever seen, but then they were getting younger all the time, she reflected bitterly, and the biggest slaughter of the war hadn't even begun. She leafed through the medical charts until she came to his. He had taken a land-mine burst in the back, had been down with dysentery and jaundice, and there were symptoms of shock after almost four years of continuous combat. After all this, he at least would be spared. She watched him dozing. She thought he looked absurdly gentle to have led a company of Commandos.

The ambulance let him off at Marble Arch. The last thing the nursing sister had told him was to keep out of the wind as much as possible. It was really howling down Oxford Street and he found himself breathing hard before he had passed a single turning.

He looked at his watch. A quarter past six. It was a damned silly idea, but he had planned it this way ever since the moment they had told him he was emplaning for home. Val had written that she worked until six-thirty every evening and he had dreamed up the wonderful idea of getting into a queue of Americans at her desk. At least it seemed wonderful thinking about it during the flight, but now it struck him as absolutely mad.

The wind whipped at his face but he didn't mind now that he had struggled to Park Street and made the turning. He knew the exact location of the club. It was on Park Street, she had written, just near the corner of Upper Brook. He had pinpointed it in his mind a thousand times during the flight. Now he heard the sound of American voices in the harsh night and as he came closer he saw the glow of their cigarettes and caught sight of a dimly lighted sign *A.R.C. Officers' Club*.

He thought it was an utterly childish idea in the first place. He should have telephoned from Croydon as any reasonable man would do. They were all looking at him now. He was making a ridiculous spectacle of himself, a British officer wandering about an American club and not too steady on his pins at that.

"Looking for anyone, Colonel?"

He wrenched off his beret and he was conscious of sweat pouring out on his forehead. He saw that the girl who had asked the question was looking anxiously at him.

"Sure you're not sick, Colonel? You look sick."

"I'm sorry. There—there isn't a chair about I—I can sit in for a minute. I'll be all right then."

She said, "Sure there is. You just come along with me."

She grasped his arm and led him into the reading room at the back of the main hall. There was a big leather couch strewn with magazines and paper-covered books. She gathered these up with a single, efficient sweep of her hand.

"You can stretch out if you like."

"A sit will do, thank you."

She said, "Don't be shy. It's been stretched out on an awful lot. Why don't you take off your coat?"

He was sure she thought he was drunk. "I'm quite all right now," he said. "I'm sorry—barging into an American club. I came looking for Miss Russell. Do you know——?"

"Val? Sure I know her. You a relative? I thought she didn't have any relatives. Her father died about a year back. I heard he was the last relative. Sweet girl, Val."

He said, "Is—is she here by any chance? I was hoping to meet her here. She does work here?"

"Bet your life. Only she took an early weekend. That's what we call it around here when you go off Fridays a couple of hours early. She had it coming. She's worked plenty nights till ten, eleven. You say you're a relative of Val's? I thought she didn't have any relatives."

He said, "No. Just a friend of the family. You say she's gone away for the weekend?"

"I don't think so. She doesn't go out of town weekends any more. Not since her father died."

"Then—then I think I'll call her flat." The coat was heavy on his shoulders. He wondered if he could muster the strength to get up.

The girl said, "Hold it a minute, Colonel. It's just possible she's in the neighborhood. I'll see if I can locate her. Just hold it a minute." She moved away from him.

She was holding the reading-room door open and the clamor of animated talk broke in from the main hall. He heard her call out over the din: "Georgina, know where Val went? Did she say? . . . Oh, damn. Have we got a note on her boy friend's number? . . . For goodness' sake, Georgina, you know him. Lieutenant Brad something. Brad Parker—that's it. He lives around here somewhere . . . Okay, forget it."

She was back now. "No dice, Colonel. If you take my advice you'll let me call your unit. You're in no shape to go traipsing around looking for Val. You can see her any day next week. I'll tell her a relative called in. I didn't catch your name. What is it again?"

He leaned against the round leather arm of the couch. The whole thing was such a bloody idiotic prank. Anyway it was just as well she had left. He didn't want her to see him, not in this condition. He'd be stronger Monday. A weekend at Small-hill would do the trick. He thought it was an odd remark about Val's boy friend, but Americans used words loosely, especially this girl. Naturally, Val would have made friends among the Americans. Still, it was an odd remark.

He said, "You're quite right. I'm not very well. I'll—I'll be in next week."

She didn't move. She said, "Say, what can we lose? I'll try her house. You wait right here, Colonel. I'll be back in a jiffy."

She went out the door. As soon as she was gone he got up and, steadying himself against a shelf of books, he put on his beret. Then he slipped out as quickly as he could between groups of officers through the main hall. Outside, the turbulent wind hit

his face with a shock that braced him momentarily. When he caught his breath he saw, miracle of miracles, that a taxi had slid to the curb and three Americans were frolicking out of it.

He fell heavily into the seat and said, "Victoria, please, driver." He thought it was clever of him not to have given the girl his name. He could try it all over again Monday, when he would be stronger.

15

THE TELEPHONE rang several times before Ray bestirred himself to answer it. It was for Valerie.

When she came away from the telephone, she gathered up her coat and cap wordlessly. Brad went with her to the door and when they were out in the corridor, he said, "John?"

She nodded. "Will you ask them to forgive me. They just called Mala from the club. He's come looking for me, at least they said a lieutenant colonel in a green beret, and he's so ill and weak he can't stand on his feet and—oh, my darling, I've got to run. I've got to run quickly."

"I'll take you there."

"No! Please, darling. Let me go now. It's nothing to do with you."

"Will you call me?"

"Of course."

He said, "I mean soon—tonight."

"Yes."

She half ran along the corridor and down the staircase, not waiting for the elevator, and long after she had gone he still heard the diminishing clatter of her footsteps and the frantic way she had said *It's nothing to do with you*. He hated going back inside to the others.

Dan said, "What's wrong, boy?"

"Nothing."

Ray squirmed deeper in his chair and said, "Better pour yourself a drink."

The spirit had gone out of the party. A fresh round of drinks, generously poured, failed in its purpose. For a time they pretended to listen to the radio. Then the clock struck eight and a few moments later the telephone rang. Brad flew to it and had the receiver off the hook before the first automatic ring was completed.

"Mr. Parker?"

"Yes."

"This is Mala, Mr. Parker. Miss Valerie asked me to telephone you. She'll try to telephone you from the railway station but when she left here she didn't quite know whether she would have the opportunity before the train went off and she asked me to telephone you just in case—are you there? Are you there, Mr. Parker?"

A great many questions tumbled into his mind. He didn't ask them because he didn't want to hear the answers. He said, "How is Colonel Wynter?"

"We don't know, Mr. Parker," the servant said firmly. "He somehow disappeared from the club. That is why Miss Valerie is going to Tunbridge Wells and she asked me to call you just in case—are you there?"

He said, "Thank you, Mala," and closed the phone.

Brad handed the driver a half crown as the taxi made its turn into Victoria and was out before it had come to a full stop. He hurried through a gothic passage that led into the station. It was a huge concourse with confusing crevices and angles.

Every crevice seemed to harbor a soldier and a girl. The civilians stood in motionless queues before the train gates all along the concourse. He saw a steel-helmeted constable, ambling importantly across the center of the station, and he pursued him.

"The next train to Tunbridge Wells, Officer."

The constable turned about slowly. "Sevenoaks, Tunbridge

Wells, St. Leonard's, and Hastings——” He rubbed his chin. “That would be platform eight. Just where you see that goods wagon, sir.”

The gate at platform eight had not yet opened. There were travelers standing before it in an orderly queue and he saw at once she was not among them. Then he thought she might be at the telephones and he raced across the concourse to the booths. They were all occupied and he peered through the glass door of each one and she wasn't in any of them.

Near the telephone booths he saw a sign *Restaurant-Tearoom*. He made for it as quickly as he could without running and pushed through a frosted glass door and there she was.

She didn't see him until he came up to the table. She had been crying. Her eyes were dry now but red-rimmed and she looked at him completely without surprise as if she knew he would come. He pulled a chair from an adjoining table and sat beside her.

She said, “There's only two or three minutes.”

“Yes.”

“You understand.”

He said, “You must go to Smallhill.”

“I must.”

After a little time he said, “Then you'll be back.”

“You're in my blood, my darling.”

“But you must go to him. I can understand it.”

“Let's not talk any more. It makes me want to die.”

They sat listening to the hollow noises in the concourse beyond the frosted door. A woman's voice on a loud-speaker was mixed up with bells and the scuff of hurrying feet and the high clear toot of a steam whistle, and then they heard the voice say, “Hurry along now for Sevenoaks, Tunbridge Wells, St. Leonard's, and . . .”

He picked up her overnight case and they went out to the concourse where the cold draft hit them.

She said, “I didn't tell you I'm glad you came. I *am* glad. It makes it easier.”

When they reached platform eight the people in the queue had already gone to the train and now the soldiers and their girls were clustered around the gate. They were Canadians and they had haversacks bulging at their hips and most of them were kissing their girls.

The voice said, "Hurry along now."

He handed her the overnight case. She looked up at him with her red-rimmed eyes and he thought this was altogether finer and better and more tender than a kiss. She must have thought so too because she turned slowly and walked through the gate. He watched her until she was lost among the Canadian soldiers far down the dark platform and he found himself standing among the waving girls.

It was a long walk back to Grosvenor Street, but he hardly noticed the distance and the cold. He knew Dan would still be there because this was the way it had to be. There was no other way.

He motioned Dan to come with him into his bedroom.

He said, "Dan, did Timmer ever say anything about me at the camp?"

"In what connection, boy?"

"In any connection."

"He said you'd come into the outfit, if that's what you mean. He was pretty damn sure of it."

"Does he want me?"

Dan said, "You kiddin'?"

"Okay. Tell him to make the request for me. I'm coming in."

"You sure, boy?"

He didn't reply. Sure was an infinitely small word in the press of all the things he felt.

Overlord

16

THE WIND careened out of the sea and snapped at the faces of the men who lay exhausted on the bluff high above the narrow beach. The place was a wild stretch of sand and cliffs west of Studland Bay on the Dorset coast.

The men belonged to Special Force 6. There were about three hundred and fifty in all. They lay on the ground in four groups near the four steel and concrete pillboxes which had been the objects of their mock attack.

Out on the far line of the sea the first gray ribbon of light burgeoned with faint shafts of pink.

"Here comes Ironbones," men muttered all over the training area and they pushed themselves to their feet, picked up their weapons, and began to form ranks before the commands to do so rang out over the howling of the wind.

They watched Timmer stride up out of the defilade that formed an exit from the beach. Ever since the attack rehearsals had begun in March, when snow often swirled off the sea, Timmer had come down to his beach headquarters in a shirt and it was inevitable that the men would call him Ironbones.

The plateau above the beach was divided down the middle by a shallow gully. On the left side of the gully, companies A, B, and C were formed up in front of the pillboxes they had in theory captured and destroyed. On the right side of the gully, more than a hundred yards distant from the nearest of the others, there was a single pillbox and before it stood company D.

The ritual never varied. As Timmer strode across the rough terrain toward company A, its commander moved out to meet

him. They exchanged salutes in the open ground and began a comparison of notes on the exercise.

Captain Peter MacEwen, a Canadian, was commander of Abel company, which was made up of British and Canadian elements. In the stripped down organizational plan of the special force, he was also second-in-command to Timmer.

He conferred with Timmer for several minutes while the four companies stood stiffly at attention. Then he turned with formal precision to face the companies. The command rang out:

"Special Force 6—Stand at ease! Stand easy!"

The command was drowned out by the noise of the wind, but the men knew what it was. This was the signal, according to Timmer's ritual, for the commanders of B, C, and D companies to come forward and join the colonel for a briefing on the results of the exercise.

Jeff Waller, whose British company B held down the left flank, and Dan, who commanded company C, set out from their respective posts and converged on Timmer at almost the same time.

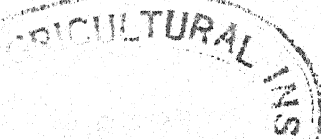
From company D, which was isolated on the right side of the gully, Brad had a much longer march. He struck out with gusto. After the rest in the cold wind, it was pleasant to move quickly. He had been with the force for nearly seven weeks and for the last two he had led company D, supplanting Lieutenant Moore, who had been switched to the headquarters platoon. Both his company command and the captaincy that went with it were provisional. He wanted desperately to nail down the job. He had worked hard for it.

When he came on the flat, Timmer returned his salute and said, "That was a nice move off the beach, Brad. Fast and quiet. You got up there on the nose."

"Thank you, sir."

"We've been wondering if you can handle it. MacEwen thinks so."

"I'm sure I can, sir."



Timmer was feeling good. He was playing it cute. He said, "Well, if MacEwen thinks you can and you think you can, I guess that buttons it up. Dog company's your baby from now on. Take damn good care of it."

17

BRAD had slept the heavy sleep of the exhausted. He moved his shoulders gingerly to see how sore the muscles were. They weren't sore at all. He lay back and enjoyed a sense of wonderful well-being. He could remember not many Sundays ago when the slightest move of a muscle after the long Saturday-night sleep brought him excruciating pain. Even the gins he had drunk with Dan, and they were a good many, might have been poured down a well for their effect on him. He felt extraordinarily fine and hard, ready for anything.

His batman, Sorensen, clattered into the tiny room. "Quarter to eight," he said in a flat voice. He was carrying a basin of steaming water and he placed it on Brad's foot locker. "Captain MacEwen told me to tell you there's a small O group with the colonel at 0900."

An O group on Sunday was unprecedented in Brad's experience with the outfit. Under the staggered leave system there was always a company commander away over Sunday and Timmer was rarely present. He usually left early in the morning for parts not completely unknown; a platoon leader had once reported seeing him in a hotel in Reading with a good-looking V.A.D., both pretty drunk.

He was definitely in camp on this Sunday. Clearly the O group was going to be a momentous event. The men of the special force, accustomed to Timmer's security precautions, had never seen anything like this. Sentries had been posted around the hut which was Timmer's headquarters. Blackout curtains had been drawn over the windows.

THE SIXTH OF JUNE

Inside the office, Timmer waited, arms akimbo, until his company commanders had settled in their chairs. Then he brought out a bulky gunny sack, placed it on the desk before him, and leaned his elbows on it.

"I think myself it's a little early in the game," his monotone began, "only April 16 today. But the people at Force G with the approval of Shaef have issued the orders and I don't intend to argue the point. They feel company commanders should be put completely in the picture before we begin the last series of rehearsals with the navy. So here goes, gentlemen."

He broke a lock on the gunny sack and brought out a map which he carefully unfolded and spread across his desk.

"Gather around," he said tersely. "Feast your eyes. This is the baby they've been working on for two years. You're looking at the Normandy coast from the mouth of the Orne river, right here—" his finger moved swiftly along the line of the coast—"to the neck of the Cherbourg peninsula, right here. That's the whole front, about sixty-five miles. All right, let's break it down. The British Second Army with Canadians under command goes in on the left. It's roughly a twenty-five-mile front from the mouth of the Orne to this place, Arromanches. Clear?"

MacEwen, who stood fascinated, said, "Clear, sir."

"Okay. Let's move to the right. Here's where the American First Army goes in. The front starts at Omaha beach, place called Colleville, and stretches around to this place, La Pecheris. Altogether, a thirty-five-mile front. Between the British right flank at Arromanches and the American left flank at Colleville, there's a hell of a gap. Five miles of it. And there won't be a link-up, not on D-day. Reason? It's impossible to make an assault landing in this five-mile gap. In most places there's no beach at all. And where there is a beach it's a narrow one and the cliffs are too steep. That's the picture, gentlemen. The British on the left, the Americans on the right, and a five-mile gap in between which can't be assaulted from the sea. Shaef would like nothing better than to leave the gap strictly alone but it happens to have a piece of high ground sticking up like a star on top a

Christmas tree. It's called Pointe Ange. And if there was a coastal gun sitting on that high ground it could raise hell with our run-in at Omaha beach and at Arromanches."

Timmer paused to light a cigarette. He drew deeply on it, coughed, and chuckled inexplicably.

"There happens to be a coastal gun sitting on that high ground, gentlemen. It's a 155 enclosed in a bunker. And that's not all. There's a combined observation and signals post and two defense casements. This thing has got to be taken by a small force, landing in the dark and getting up to the high ground before the enemy knows what the score is. And it's got to be taken just before H-hour. Tactical surprise is absolutely essential, otherwise there isn't a hope in hell of reaching the high ground. And gentlemen, no ifs, ands, or buts, it's *got* to be taken."

An off-center grin played on Timmer's heavy lips. "I needn't tell you that the force is us and the job is what we've been training for. How do you like it?"

Brad glanced around at the others. Dan winked at him; it was a strangely comical and reassuring wink. Waller bore a puzzled look as if he didn't quite understand. MacEwen said, "It's not a question of liking it, Colonel. The question is, what's the enemy strength?"

Timmer's crooked grin grew wider. He rummaged inside the gunny sack and came up with a document.

"This is the latest G-2 appreciation, dated March 25. It says, 'The enemy garrison holding the Pointe Ange station is made up of army and Luftwaffe ground personnel, most of whom did not originally form the garrison but who were brought in after special training within the last six weeks. At the present time it is estimated that the troops number from 115 to 130, but this includes signals technicians. Morale is reported high due to realization of the impregnability of their position. Agents have been sent into the area and a more detailed report may be expected about D minus 10.' "

Timmer put away the document, rubbed his hands briskly,

and glanced around at his captains as if to see if there were any weak sisters.

"All right. You know how we operate in the big picture. Now let's get down to our own picture and I promise you it's rugged, plenty rugged."

From under his desk he drew a huge canvas map case. He unbuckled the flap and let it fall, revealing a detailed operations map of Pointe Ange.

Timmer said, "This shouldn't be news to you. It's practically our old operations map, but I want to point out a couple of important differences. The high ground is one hundred and twenty-five feet above the beach, twenty feet higher than we've been climbing. And this depression in the middle is precipitous. You can't move across it. This means that you, Brad, you'll be on your lonesome over here on the right. Not too bad though. The bunker is the smallest of the four—not more than fifteen-twenty men, nothing heavier in it than MG. And when you take it, you're through. You can't move over to support the others.

"On the left though it's more complicated. Once Baker and Charlie companies take their objectives, they've got to organize covering fire for Abel company to move through to the final objective—the signals post. It's a tricky one for you, Peter. You've got a deep penetration to make and you can't make it unless Dan and Jeff give you maximum cover fire. And of course, if you need extra help I'll be holding the headquarters platoon in reserve. Got it, men?"

The captains studied the map long after Timmer had finished. It was clearer than ever that A company had drawn the toughest job of all. MacEwen would have to lead his men into the deepest penetration and against a fully alerted garrison in the signals post. The unasked question hung heavy over the quiet room. Each man knew what the other was thinking. What happens to MacEwen if Stenick and Waller fail in their missions?

Waller finally broke the silence. He said, "Don't worry, Pete. Dan and I will clean up quick and give you plenty of fire support."

"Betcha," Dan said.

MacEwen, rubbing his chin thoughtfully, said, "I'm sure you will, but willy-nilly I've got the proper lads for the job."

He had quietness and quality, Brad thought. He was the real leader of Special Force 6. Looking at the man hunched over the map, he knew that MacEwen's company would go in and the signals post would be put out of action.

Timmer said, "All right. Forget the map and let me have your attention. Supreme headquarters has issued two orders to insure maximum security. The first, gentlemen, you will note almost immediately. All officers not authorized to be in the picture are being issued with white tabs to be worn on their epaulets. This will be a constant reminder to you men who are in the picture that you carry a heavy responsibility in your daily association with other officers.

"The second order from Shaef becomes effective fifteen days from now. At 2400 hours April 30 every camp on the south coast will be sealed off from the remainder of the country. There will be no passage in or out except on the most urgent official business.

"We in Special Force 6 have an added responsibility. We can't take the slightest chance on a security leak. As I told you, we need complete tactical surprise on Pointe Ange or we're stone-cold dead on the beach. I don't know about you men but I intend to come out of this thing alive.

"Therefore, gentlemen, I have advanced the Shaef order as it applies to personnel of Special Force 6. Effective immediately, all leaves are canceled. That's all, gentlemen."

The encampment was extraordinarily quiet that afternoon. Brad lay on his cot. He counted the slats on the ceiling and the strips of tar paper where the leaks had been stopped up. He thought about the battle and about Valerie, whether he would ever see her again. Now it depended on the battle.

Valerie would be at Smallhill now. She was at Smallhill on every Sunday afternoon and she wrote him every Sunday night when she got home.

"Someday I shall remember this spring," she had written in her last letter, "and I shall hate it. I hate it now. I was at Small-hill this afternoon. The fields are growing deeply green and there has never been such a year for roses. But the rumble never ceases on the road leading down to the coast and the dust never settles.

"John seems to hear the rumble of the convoys a great deal more distinctly than I do. That's, I'm sure, because he listens for it. This afternoon he said quite suddenly, 'You'd think, Val, they'd call me in. I'm fit enough. After all the little parties, it would be damnably silly to miss the big one.' He reminds me of my father. I wonder what it is about war that makes men so utterly lonely when they come out of it?

"I hate to hear the convoys because I have the most terrible premonition that you are riding in one of them and I want to run out to the main road and look inside each troop carrier on the chance of a glimpse of you. I wish I could be sure you are still on the staff side. I'm terribly frightened. Aren't you ever going to get leave?

"Do you remember how it was when we first met? I told you all about John and you talked a great deal about your wife Jane and we were both so splendidly honest. And even later on, we still wondered about them and about ourselves. It was easy to blame the war then, the great restless war, flinging us together and tossing us apart, and we fell into the habit of drifting with the war. On a clear day, standing on tiptoe, one can almost see the end of the war now. And I die for you and long to see you safely back. What will become of us? What, my darling? . . ."

Timmer didn't show up in A-mess for supper that night. His batman brought word that the officers needn't wait, that the colonel would be eating in his quarters.

A movie was showing in the wet canteen, Gable and Crawford in *Strange Cargo*. Brad slipped out after ten minutes. He had been thinking about Timmer. He felt he knew the man better than the others. He knew the misgivings as well as the bravado, the strain no less than the ambition.

Timmer's jeep was parked outside his quarters. Brad paused a moment and wondered if he should go in. He had nothing to say and yet he felt urged to pay a friendly call.

He knocked on Timmer's door. He thought he heard a grunt and let himself in. Timmer lay heaped over his desk. His massive head was burried in his arms and his muffled snores droned through the room.

Brad said, "Sir——" and then he saw that a tumbler had shattered on the floor and near it an empty whisky bottle, lying on its side, as if Timmer had flung them away in disgust before he had passed out. He was lying over his map case and the narrow chain attached to the handle was looped around his wrist.

The next morning the four companies were on the bluff rehearsing holding attacks against the concrete pillboxes, one platoon firing with mortars and MG while another positioned itself to press a two-pronged assault with grenade and bayonet.

Timmer stood on the edge of the bluff in his cotton shirt, scowling and roaring and cutting easily the bravest figure on the whole of the south coast.

18

LONDON was all waiting and whispering. It was a conspiratorial city. Its people awoke each morning and thrust aside the blackout curtains and peered out as if the news might be emblazoned in the sky. They turned on the wireless and listened for the voice of Churchill telling them that this was the day. They went out into the streets and business places and exchanged rumors. All over the world all kinds of people wondered, and some wondered and prayed.

Janie was one of those who wondered and prayed. Her mind would not be diverted from a growing agony over Brad and she learned to hate the long Connecticut twilights for it seemed

to her that time also stood still, holding its breath in anticipation of the great and dreadful day.

But nowhere in the world was it quite like in London. Here they could feel the drama, feel it physically, it was so close to them, only an hour's train run to the south coast. They could see the dispatch riders hurtling through the hushed streets from one secret headquarters to another, and in staff cars they could glimpse the grim faces of generals and admirals. Into this foreboding city Alex Timmer rode on the last Saturday in May.

He had been summoned to a final conference of small-unit commanders called for the purpose of checking and confirming their movement to the marshaling areas and of briefing them on the latest Intelligence reports relative to their assault points.

The conference was held in a school in suburban London, in a huge room with rising tiers of desks. Timmer glanced around and could see only full colonels and brigadier generals and a few major generals. It confirmed everything he had been thinking. He was right up there knocking on the door. He scarcely listened to the nasal voice of the little British general who looked like a shopkeeper. "Don't worry about your flanks," the man was saying, "don't try to mop up on the beaches. The idea is to break through the crust and push on inland. That's the idea," he droned repeatedly, "break through and push on inland." Cheerleader stuff, Timmer thought. It didn't apply to him anyway. His was a clean operation, clean and rugged, and he didn't have to worry about pushing inland.

Upstairs in Movement Control, Timmer examined a map of the marshaling area on the outskirts of Southampton, checked the site reserved for Special Force 6, and put in a few stout complaints about the amount of transport allotted to him.

Then he went to Intelligence.

"Not too happy news, I'm afraid, sir," a bespectacled British major of Intelligence said cheerfully. He swung his head from a map of Pointe Ange to a document and back again incessantly. "Our people in the area suspect the old Jerry has thickened it up a bit. Lots of activity around the point, they report."

When Timmer left the building he thought he had better go up to his old club on the Haymarket and get a drink.

Shortly after midnight a staff car cleared the check point of SHAEF's advanced headquarters at Bushey Park and accelerated swiftly on the dark, deserted highway toward London. It contained a very angry brigadier general whose name was Ulysses S. Backhouse. Wasn't he entitled to *some* sleep, he muttered to himself, a *little* sleep? He had been trying all evening to clean up his desk and get to bed, but one problem after another had kept skimming in. With thirty-nine divisions and over four thousand landing craft being jockeyed into position in the narrow sea and land spaces of the south coast, there was no end to the problems, and toward midnight he had told himself, to hell with it, he had better get some sleep. That was when his aide had come in with the message that Norfolk House required him immediately for an emergency meeting.

When he stepped into Major General Pike's office, his anger became laced with disgust. He was never fond of Marcus Pike, who had been pompous even when they were classmates at West Point, and he positively disliked Major General Mellinsbeck who was Pike's British opposite number. Besides the two generals, the room contained a Canadian colonel he had never seen before and two provost-marshal captains. This cast of characters confirmed in his mind that there was no real emergency.

It didn't help at all when Pike said, "Sorry to get you down here, Backhouse. We simply couldn't take action without Bushey Park being represented."

"What is it, General?"

"Just pure bloody murder, that's all. It's about Special Force 6."

"What's wrong with Special Force 6?"

"Not a thing," Pike said tartly, "except that its commanding officer, a fellow called Timmer, was picked up tonight in a doorway in the Strand. He was dead drunk and he was talking to an audience on the street about the operation."

THE SIXTH OF JUNE

"Oh God!"

Pike enjoyed a flicker of a smile.

"I'm afraid *we'll* have to play God in this matter." He turned to the two provosts. "You needn't stay. Let Colonel Timmer sleep it off and have him report to me in the morning." When they had gone, he said, "Well, gentlemen, we have two specifications to decide—quickly. One, is Colonel Timmer fit to remain in command and, if negative, two, where do we go from here? I needn't remind you that they move into the marshaling area tomorrow and every hour counts."

The Canadian, whose name was McNeil, said quietly, "We dropped a valuable officer less than a month ago under similar circumstances. Our man didn't talk, thank heaven, but we have a firm policy about alcoholics remaining in control of troops."

Backhouse nodded. He was sick with chagrin. He said, "I'm thinking about security. What did he say? Anybody know?"

Pike thumbed a document he had been holding. "We've got the report of the police constable who picked him up. He says, 'I was proceeding up the Strand on my regular rounds when at 11:08 approx I noticed several persons, eight or ten, gathered about a cobbler's shop just down from the Savoy. I proceeded to investigate the cause. When I pushed through the crowd I saw the lieutenant colonel in question sitting in the doorway. There were indications he was very drunk. In my judgment he was semiconscious. He was speaking very indistinctly. He seemed to be referring to military matters. According to my notes, he spoke in my presence the following remarks: *See the gap? Sticks out like a sore thumb. Smack between Gold beach and Omaha. Good old Pete MacEwen.* I remember he mentioned the name *MacEwen* several times. Then he said *Not very happy news. The old Jerry has thickened it up. Takes guts to give the order. Good old Abel company. Smack between Gold beach and Omaha.* Then he said *Angel Point. Good old name. Good old Pete. Good old angel.* I managed to quiet him down and he snored until the vehicle arrived.'"

After a silence, Backhouse said miserably, "Who's MacEwen?"

LIONEL SHAPIRO

The Canadian said, "His 2IC. Also his Abel company commander. Grand type. He gave up a majority to join the special force."

The three pairs of eyes fixed on Backhouse. He drummed his fingers on the arm of his chair. Although he was not the senior officer, he represented supreme headquarters and the responsibility rested heavily on him.

He said slowly, "God, what a vicious thing to do—even drunk. Let's settle Timmer first. Does he operate?" It was an unnecessary question. The three faces he looked into were stony. "All right, he doesn't operate. Then I suggest we go by the book. The 2IC takes over, this fellow MacEwen, and everybody moves up a notch. The reinforcement pool can whistle up a good smart platoon leader for the bottom slot."

Mellinsbeck shook his head. "Won't wash, old man. We can't take MacEwen off Abel company. It's the heart of the operation. Look at it." He handed over the operations order and a map trace of the final phase.

Backhouse glanced over the documents and nodded his agreement. "Well," he said briskly, "at least we've decided something. Timmer's out and we need a new O.C. And for God's sake, let's get somebody who's been through this sort of thing. Good Ranger or Commando type who can control the show from the beach end without getting into an uproar."

Special Force 6 broke camp toward dusk on a warm and pleasant evening. By the time darkness fell its convoy had merged into an endless line of traffic moving slowly toward the marshaling area on the outskirts of Southampton.

Captain MacEwen rode at the head of the convoy. He rode in a station wagon reserved for the commanding officer. He had been told that Timmer had been relieved, though not why, and that a new commanding officer would take over when they reached the marshaling area.

Shortly after midnight the convoy rolled through a gate into a tented area. The men dropped off the trucks, stretched them-

selves, and lined up by squads. They could see little except the tents to which they were assigned and the ones immediately neighboring, but they heard commands echoing over a great distance and they felt there were many thousands of men around them.

The morning was clear and warm. When the men formed a long line at the field kitchen the word spread around quickly that a new commanding officer had arrived and that he was a lieutenant colonel of the British Commandos and his name was John Wynter.

The date was the thirtieth of May.

19

ALL during the night and morning, truck convoys rolled south to the marshaling areas on the outskirts of the ports from Southampton to Plymouth. When the assault troops spilled out at their sub-areas in the great tented cities enclosed by barbed wire and heavily guarded against the slightest contact with the outside world, they fell quiet. It was as if they had come to realize for the first time that the gate through which they had entered was a one-way gate, that the break with the world they had always known was irrevocable, that the only path they could beat back to that world was funneled through another gate that led to the docks and the ships and into the organized fire and mathematically calculated death on the beaches.

Gradually the atmosphere changed. The recreation staffs began operating, the weather turned warm and pleasant, and a holiday lightness came into the camp. But the gaiety was spurious. What the men felt was written in long, intense letters home and was reflected in the enormous stakes at the poker tables and was etched on the faces of those who lay on the grass and stared at the sky.

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With the exception of Captain MacEwen, the officers of Special Force 6 had not yet seen their new O.C. He had arrived during the night. Very early in the morning MacEwen had been summoned to his tent and here it was nearly noon and they hadn't emerged.

The remainder of the officers, the three captains and the platoon leaders, lolled on the grass a short distance from the O.C.'s tent and speculated on what might have happened to Timmer.

"Maybe they made him a chicken colonel and gave him a full battalion. He's been bucking for it."

"Naw. I heard he was sick. Nothing else would keep him off the operation."

"It sure is a mystery."

Brad had scarcely thought about Timmer. He had been watching the O.C.'s tent all morning, wishing the flaps would open. He was wildly curious about John Wynter, what he looked like, how he would react when they met—if he reacted at all. He felt he knew the man intimately but only as a wraith, as a shadowed person whose sole purpose was to stand between him and his complete happiness with Valerie. At first he had tried to argue himself into the notion that this couldn't be the same John Wynter, that there must be two John Wynters in the British forces, but now he felt a sense of foreordination in the whole affair. This was the pattern; there could be no other for the last short violent journey to fulfillment.

Dan Stenick said, "Jeez, I wish this guy would hurry up. Then we can go catch a movie. I hear there's a beaut. Alan Ladd licks the whole goddamn Jap army with a rusty schmeisser and a couple rocks. Maybe we can learn somethin'——"

Waller said, "Hold it, men. Here he comes."

They all scrambled to their feet, adjusted their caps, and stood easy.

He was slighter than Brad had pictured him and his face pleasanter though by no means handsome. His battle dress, though clean and neatly pressed, had seen years of service and

fitted too snugly around his narrow chest. He carried no side arms, only a swagger stick which he hit lightly against his leg as he came forward.

He didn't see them at once: His head was bowed, listening thoughtfully to what MacEwen was saying as the two men came across the short piece of ground, and when he looked up he seemed genuinely surprised.

He said, "I'm sorry, gentlemen. I hadn't realized you were waiting."

MacEwen said, "I had them stand by, sir. I thought you'd want to meet them."

"I most certainly would."

Brad glanced at the others. He wondered if they were as puzzled as he was. The man moved and talked with a certain finely grained awkwardness which was the quintessence of shyness. He was the perfect antithesis of Alex Timmer.

Brad was third in line. John repeated his name and shook his hand firmly and looked at him honestly as he had done with the others, but there was an extra moment of hesitation in the handshake and a look of sharp appraisal in the Englishman's pale blue eyes, and Brad thought, Valerie has told him. Then John passed along the line to the lieutenants and Brad thought, No, he doesn't know. The reaction was too slight, he told himself. No man, not even an Englishman, was that good an actor.

When the introductions had been completed, the officers broke ranks and gathered around their new commander. He looked at the ground and bent his swagger stick back and forth and said, "I'm sure you're most anxious to know about Colonel Timmer. I'm afraid, though, I can only pass on what I was told in London yesterday. Your colonel has been taken ill—not seriously, I'm given to understand—but he'll certainly be unfit for this operation. Pity. I'm sure it's as great a disappointment to you as it must be to him."

"As for myself, I'm delighted to be back in action, particularly with so fine a body of men. I should have thought that Captain MacEwen would be appointed to the command; I feel

it's quite unfair that he wasn't, but of course I'll do my best as I'm sure you will. We have a neat operation, plenty of hard fighting but nothing complex, and if we all do our jobs I see no reason in the world why we shouldn't have maximum success.

"That's about all. If you don't see very much of me before we move on, don't feel I'm being exclusive. It's just that I have a good deal of boning up to do—but of course please feel free to barge in on me at any time."

He flicked at a blade of grass with his swagger stick, looked at them all thoughtfully and walked slowly to his tent.

Toward dark on Friday, the second of June, a leisurely life of eating, sleeping, poker, movies, and letter writing came to an abrupt end for the men of Special Force 6.

The music cut out of the loud-speaker in their sub-area and in its stead came a series of sharp instructions. Officers and non-coms added their stern voices to the cadence of commands and the city of slate gray tents came alive with hurrying men. Troops turned in their blankets and cots to QM stores; they paraded at the pay office and received shiny little bills which represented French francs and didn't look like money at all; they drew emergency rations and medical kit; they donned heavy underwear, specially issued, and rubberized battle dress.

At 2230 hours, as an ominously black night rolled over the south coast, the men of Special Force 6 climbed into trucks and rode through the south gate of the camp toward the docks.

It was the slowness of the journey that made it miserable and memorable. The narrow Southampton street along which they moved was clogged with a double line of traffic. Tanks with flail chains were tangled with troop transporters and bulldozers and self-propelled artillery and jeeps. The awkward paraphernalia of war made a confusing cavalcade and one wondered how these unwieldy instruments would ever be sorted out and unleashed on the beach across the Channel. The great mass moved slowly, a few feet at a time, and then waited endlessly.

Eventually they marched down a cement ramp to the broad

open deck of a ferry. Out beyond the hards the invasion fleet rode at anchor, hundreds of gray-painted ships of all sizes and shapes waiting to accept a complement of men and machines and to sail out over the Channel to the most massive amphibious assault in history.

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IT WAS the third day and they had not yet sailed.

Life aboard the *Great Wallsend*, an ancient 3000-tonner that had once run the North Sea passage between Harwich and Flushing, had deteriorated from excited vigil above decks to abject boredom below. The view from the rails had become an eyesore, a few deserted boathouses on the Isle of Wight and the ships close at anchor, an LST, two LCIs, and an old destroyer with three upright stacks. The men had already used their daggers to carve their names on every free wood surface from stem to stern. The rumors that had swept the ship had run the gamut down to cancellation of the whole show, and by the afternoon of the third day, a cloudy, windy day, almost everyone lay below decks and had ceased to care whether the ship ever sailed.

Then it happened.

The harsh squeal of a straining winch penetrated into the tiny cabin where Brad lay on a narrow steel hammock lashed against the wall. He dropped the paper-backed book he had been reading and glanced across an eighteen-inch space between the hammocks to see how his cabin mates were reacting. Lieutenants Norden and Urquhart, his platoon leaders, had been writing letters on pads propped up against their knees and now they too looked about and listened. For three days the only sounds had been the hollow slap of the wind against the hull and the creak of the cables which supported the twelve assault landing craft on their davits. This was a new sound. From

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above decks they heard a crisp Scottish voice call out, "Skipper to *ferrst* lieutenant—shorten in!"

"Aye aye, sir."

"Bridge to fo'c'stle—weigh!"

The winch started up again and the three men in the cabin swung their legs down from the hammocks.

Now a new sound, a deep rich rumble from the bowels of the ship, came into the tiny cabin. The three men leaped down from their hammocks and made for the door. Urquhart reached it first and effectively blocked the passage.

He said, "What's today, Norden?"

"Monday. The fifth."

"Gee," Urquhart exclaimed, "I'm rich!" He reached into his blouse pocket and pulled out a slip of paper and waved it under Norden's nose. "I got it. I won the pool. I drew the sixth of June!"

There was no question of it. The invasion was underway. The creaky old *Great Wallsend* was sailing steadily through the Solent and hundreds of other ships that had lain stodgily at anchor moved in concert with her.

Brad leaned against a port rail, clear of an overhanging assault craft. A strip of English coast which had been green a few minutes before was turning gray in the distance. He thought there must be people on the shore watching the ships, pitying the men in them, knowing tomorrow would be D-day. He glanced at the man next to him, a chunky, beady-eyed British corporal with a stolid face, his helmet at a rakish angle. He felt sorry for this man but he was pretty sure he himself was going to survive the dawn.

From the moment of sailing the ship's loud-speaker had been droning a series of instructions about smoking on deck, about the method of inflating life belts, about defacing the property of His Majesty's Navy. Now, after a few moments of silence, the speaker announced:

"Attention! All officers of Special Force 6 will proceed immediately to the wardroom on A deck forward. Officers only. Immediately, please."

An operational map of Pointe Ange with the phase lines drawn in had been pinned against a wall in the wardroom. John Wynter and Captain MacEwen stood before it, studying it with deep concentration.

When the officers, fourteen all told, had seated themselves loosely around a huge, leather-covered table, John turned about.

"All here? Good. Let's get cracking." His voice was soft but crisp and authoritative. Unlike the day in the marshaling area when he had taken command, there were no awkward hesitations.

He said, "I've two bits of news you can pass on to the troops. First is that the met people assure us we'll have heavy overcast which means our chances of getting ashore undetected are very good indeed and we'll be able to run in to the beach closer to our objectives than we planned. Second, the beach at Pointe Ange is not mined. I had this from the navy when I visited headquarters on Wight this afternoon. As a result our skipper assures me his men will give us a dry landing from the assault craft, so I think we can go right ahead and mark up the exact location of the beach HQ . . ."

He drew a circle on the map and called out the co-ordinates. In the review that followed, the men began to understand why they had seen so little of their O.C. His knowledge of the operation was meticulous for every phase down to platoons and squads and the manner of his instruction bore an imprint of complete confidence.

Then, as his review drew to a close, he made an announcement that caught up his small audience sharply and incredulously. He said, "At this point, gentlemen, I think I should tell you of the only radical change I've made in the plan. With Captain MacEwen's consent which I obtained, I must say, over his very vigorous objections, I am taking command of Abel company——"

He paused to allow an impulsive murmur among the men to subside. His face grew stern, as if to remind them he was still commander and would brook no dissent, but his voice remained soft.

"It was the only course. If you think it over, I'm sure you'll agree. I've been with you quite long enough to realize that Captain MacEwen has a more thorough grasp of the whole operation than I could possibly have. And not only of the operation. He knows each one of you and the non-coms personally, your strong points, your weaknesses, your reflexes, and I'm sure he can make a wiser decision, certainly a prompter one, on where and when to commit the reserve. He also has the necessary qualities. In my opinion, he should have succeeded to command, but that of course was not my decision to make. However, here we are out at sea and the wireless is quite dead, so I have taken completely unfair advantage of my rank and have nominated myself to lead Abel company. This last word, gentlemen. Speed and boldness are the keys to this kind of operation. We've a certain number of lumps to take, but remember, you'll give better than you take and in the long run more lads will be alive when it's over. That is really all. I've always found it a good idea to put the operation completely out of mind for the last few hours to zero. Shall we, gentlemen?"

They didn't follow his advice. After he had left the ward-room their minds were filled with the operation though, for a time, not a word was uttered. Each man understood what the decision entailed and was shocked no less than captivated by the casualness of the O.C.'s announcement, but the eve of battle was no time to put such thoughts into words.

Presently MacEwen did it. He jammed a cigarette into his mouth, looked hard at the leather on the table, and growled, "There's no one else who'd ask it——" He paused and added savagely, "And no one else I'd let have it."

The commissionaire on night duty at the Park Street club shuffled down the stairs to the main hall and drew the blackout curtains over the windows and the doorway. The light from the main chandelier was dim but Valerie didn't turn on her desk lamp. There was no need; not a single visitor had entered the club.

Edna had also failed to turn on her lamp. Valerie looked at her across the hall, wondering if she also knew. Their eyes met and Valerie saw that she knew.

This was the eve. No one had told her but she knew as surely as if she were standing atop the white cliffs watching the ships move over the bend of the darkening sea. The foreboding had developed slowly as the torpid day wore on and now at dusk it drove into her fully and relentlessly. This was the eve and tomorrow was the day.

The girls looked at each other and Edna said, "Do you feel what I feel?"

"Yes."

"Tomorrow's the day, I guess."

Valerie said, "I'm afraid so."

"So am I." The American girl made an unhappy face and then she said, "It's a funny thing. I've got nobody in it but I want to cry all the same."

Valerie thought, My whole life is in it. She hated herself for being English, for having been taught not to cry. She had so much to cry for. She had known for almost a month that Brad was in it, ever since his last letter had come with a censorship seal over its flap and he had written, ". . . Don't misunderstand if you don't hear from me for a little while . . ." If she could only misunderstand. She couldn't. The meaning was terrifyingly clear. And now John had gone too—John who was sweet and undemanding. "Temporary duty," he had told her on the telephone, "back soon." She had been suspicious of the unaccustomed briskness in his voice but she couldn't believe he was on the assault. He wouldn't be on such short notice. Yet she couldn't be sure. It was more than a week and he hadn't come back and tomorrow was the day.

She said, "It will be a dreadfully long night."

Inside the ship the troops slept everywhere, on tables and floors in the mess decks, in the passageways, and in what had been the main lounge. They slept fully dressed beneath the

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single blanket that had been issued to them. Infrequently a man gave up trying to sleep and rolled up his blanket and stepped gingerly across the bodies of his comrades and went up to the deck, but most of the troops slept solidly in their bulky clothes and the bells of the watch failed to disturb the calm on their wind-burned faces.

When the bells sounded two o'clock, Brad was on deck. After a time he became aware that someone stood at the rail beside him. He saw it was John Wynter. The Englishman peered down into the water.

"Spotted you from the bridge. Can't sleep?"

"I'm afraid not, sir."

John chuckled mildly. "If you feel drowsy later on, take a benzedrine. There'll be a bottle of them on the breakfast table. Should carry you through nicely."

They stood together silently. Brad wished he would go away. He wanted desperately not to have to talk to this man. They peered down from the rail and watched a white sheath of water thrashing away from the hull.

John said, "I take it this is your first show."

"Yes."

"It's the best, Captain. The first is always the best."

Brad thought the man was patronizing him. He turned to look at him and met a faintly apologetic smile.

"I do mean it, Captain. The first is really fine. It's new and challenging and you have all your luck riding with you. That's important. A lot of men have chipped their luck away bit by bit until there's only a little left. But when you've got all of it, you're in great form. I rather envy you."

Brad knew he was talking about himself. The anger that had lain deep within him ever since John had arrived to take command surged into his mind. He faced the Englishman squarely. "Why did you take the job, Colonel?"

John said, "You mean the special force?"

"Yes."

"Why did I take it? It's a strange question," John said. "Do the officers resent it?"

"They have the greatest confidence in you."

"And Captain MacEwen. Does he resent it?"

Brad said, "He has no pretensions. He wants to win."

"That was exactly my impression. He's first class."

There was another silence. A few feet below them a wave rose precipitously out of the choppy sea and crashed against the hull.

John said, "Why did I take the job? It's hard to say, Captain. They were up a tree for someone quite suddenly and I'd put in for a post on the show and I got it—but that's not the answer. I suppose it's because I know this sort of thing. It's the only job I do know. I was never much good at anything before the war and I imagine I'll be a rank failure after it's over, so a chap does what he can when he feels he's of some use."

Brad's anger fell away. He said, "You didn't mind me asking?"

"Not at all. I'm sure you must have been wondering." He added quietly, "It's an odd place for us to be meeting."

Oh God, Brad thought suddenly. *He knows. He's known all the time.* He thought, *Damn the English. Damn their façade. He's known all the time.*

A thrum of aircraft flying very high and in great number filled the air. The two men waited until it had passed out of their hearing.

Then Brad said, "How is Valerie?"

"Lovely as always."

A wave struck the hull amidships and a curtain of spray was flung up. The wind whipped it into their faces.

John said, "Treacherous old beast, the Channel."

Then bells sounded on the bridge and the ship's loud-speaker called out: "Attention all personnel! Attention all personnel! Breakfast in ten minutes. Clear the mess decks! Lively now!"

John said, "Here we go." The two men walked a short piece along the deck and pushed through a double set of blackout curtains. Inside the ship the bright lights had been turned on and the men who had been sleeping fidgeted on the floor and came slowly to their feet and rolled their blankets.

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The loud-speaker came on once more: "This is the skipper speaking. We are approaching our launching station. Everything is going well. Don't mull over your breakfast. Launching will begin in exactly forty minutes. Good luck to all of you." The loud-speaker clicked off and the men who had been rubbing their eyes leaped to their feet and made for their company stations. There was a confusing cross-traffic at the hatchways but hardly any talk.

John studied his watch. Then he looked at Brad lightly and pleasantly and said, "I think I'd better shave. Good luck."

21

THE men of Dog company stood hidden by the starless night beneath a rocky outcropping on the narrow beach. They waited for the signal that would propel them into action, that would send them scurrying eastward along the beach for sixty-five yards where, according to the map, a defilade opened a way to the high ground.

They were panting though the run from the ramps of the landing craft to the shelter of the outcropping had been a short one. It was the deadly excitement of waiting that made them pant. The three other companies and the HQ platoon had landed farther down the beach and had to be given time to form up at their starting points which were almost half a mile west of where Dog company stood.

Far out on the sea to the east and west, tiny tongues of flame spurted out of the dark and the deep, full-throated roar of 16-inch naval guns raced across the water and echoed in wave after wave against the shelf of rock where the men stood. The thrum of hundreds of bombers flying high over the coastline was ceaseless. The men didn't look out to sea or up into the black sky. They peered at the limned figures of their platoon leaders, and the platoon leaders kept their eyes glued on the company commander, waiting for him to give the signal.

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Brad studied his watch. He was scarcely conscious of the distant thunder of the naval guns and the ceaseless thrum of aircraft. He counted the seconds ticking off and listened for another sound, a sound of small-arms fire. This would be the signal that one of the other companies had been intercepted on its way to its starting line. If this happened, the zero hour for the synchronized attack they had rehearsed for so long would be jettisoned and he would, in the words of the operations order, "act independently to the capture and complete destruction of D company objective."

It hadn't happened. Not yet. The luminous hand turned slowly around the face of the watch. Now the arc of the sky had turned from black to murky purple and a thin line of light was rising out of the sea. The beach where he stood was still cloaked in impenetrable darkness. He wondered if the navy people who had set the timing of the operation to coincide with an exact degree of first light had made a mistake. He glanced at the watch. Two minutes to go and there wasn't enough light, not nearly enough light for sure footing on the climb up the defilade. Perhaps the timing was all wrong. Perhaps a clerk in the navy met office had made a simple mathematical error.

He checked himself. There were eighty-five men peering at him and he was their commander. A few were close enough to see the expression on his face. He forced his clenched teeth apart and moved the hand that held the watch in a small circle to show that he was relaxed. He tried to gauge his fear. There was some, perhaps a lot in him. This was his first battle. He had no way of knowing how much fear he was entitled to feel. He remembered Dan saying once, "You're scared all the time, boy, but you're too busy to know it." He wasn't busy now and he was scared.

One minute to go and there had been no rifle signal. This meant that the other companies had reached their starting lines without interception. The Germans would be alert of course. The bombardment of the beaches to the east and west would have alerted them. They might even know there was an enemy on the beach below making ready to storm them. The fact that

there had been no rifle signal didn't necessarily mean the Germans were unaware of the impending attack. It depended on the commander of the *Stuetzpunktgruppe*. If he was cool and clever, he would preserve silence and meet the assault from his positions of strength behind concrete fortifications. He would know soon enough. The second hand on his watch passed the thirty mark. The men were shuffling with impatience.

The navy people hadn't made a mistake. The light was coming up steadily over the line of the sea. He could make out a wooden ration box half buried in the sand about twenty yards ahead. He hadn't seen it before. This was the visibility they had been planning on. By the time they reached the wire on the edge of the high ground, the light would be good enough for sure footing but still too poor for the Germans in the pillbox to see them setting the bangalores. The navy people were wonderful. Right on the nose.

The second hand came up to the sixty. He raised his arm and the men moved swiftly along the narrow stretch of wet sand.

The light that had appeared hesitantly on the edge of the purplish sky was a welcome sight for a young *Oberleutnant* of signals in the Pointe Ange station. He had been on duty in the big underground casement all night, a terrible night of telegraph keys clicking without a moment's respite and telephone bells ringing with wild impatience and the *Oberst* pacing about in a foul mood. He had never experienced a night of such utter confusion.

He himself was confused. He admired the Wehrmacht. He thought it was the finest human instrument created by the Reich. Yet the generals couldn't make up their minds whether or not a full-scale assault was being aimed at the Normandy coast. Not a single troop movement had been ordered, even in the face of the shelling and bombing of the coastal positions and authentic reports of massive parachute drops behind the fortifications.

He remembered clearly when the confusion had begun. It

was at exactly 0145 hours. The Intelligence section of the 709th Infantry Division at Cherbourg signaled urgently that a mass of American parachute troops had dropped in the vicinity of Ste. Mère Eglise. But not more than five minutes later, the same Intelligence section corrected its previous report and indicated that the occurrence was merely an arms drop to the FFI and was being investigated. Then the 716th Infantry Division at Caen signaled a British parachute drop at the mouth of the Orne. Headquarters of the Seventh Army at Falaise immediately asked for clarification. Was it a raid or an arms drop? And was it at Ste. Mère Eglise or at the mouth of the Orne? Nobody seemed to want to say definitely. Then the navy confounded the already terrible mess. The navy station at Courseulles signaled that radar findings showed a great mass of ships approaching the Bay of the Seine, but this interpretation was overruled by Naval District Headquarters at Le Havre. It reported to Seventh Army that sea and weather conditions were clearly unfavorable for an assault and what the Courseulles station had reported was a diversionary maneuver at best. Then Seventh Army contacted the Calais station and the latter reported that the enemy assault fleet based on Dover-Folkestone had definitely not put out to sea. Then the Luftwaffe at Carpiquet airdrome signaled that their night patrols had observed a mass of assault ships in mid-Channel. This launched a new spate of messages between Cherbourg, Caen, Calais, and Seventh Army. The messages were angry and confused and by 0545, when the bombardment of the beaches began, not a single headquarters would make a formal declaration that the long-awaited assault was underway, and Seventh Army was still asking for clarification.

The *Oberleutnant* concluded sadly that this was a perfect illustration of what was called the fog of war. He handed over his duties to his deputy, slung his field glasses over his shoulder, and came up out of the casement.

It was not quite light yet. He could barely make out the rounded tops of the pillboxes to the right and left which de-

fended the signals station though each was only a hundred meters distant. He looked behind him across the gulley and couldn't see the third pillbox at all.

He walked down the open ground between the two pillboxes, moving carefully in the uncertain light because the ground was pitted with shallow bomb holes. He listened to the salvos of naval artillery and the drone of the planes and he thought it would be something to see when the light became good enough.

He kept on walking until he reached the wire on the edge of the bluff. New wire had been looped over the old wire and it rose to a height above the line of his sight, so he moved away from the wire to a clump of low-growing bushes over which he could have an unimpeded view of the sea and the beaches.

He reached down at his hip for his field glasses. Then he paused. He thought he saw a heap of loosely strung wire lift into the air as though by unseen hands. Fascinated, he watched it for a few moments. He saw the glint of a helmet. Someone was trying to crawl up from under the wire.

He let his field glasses fall back quietly into the case on his hip and reached instead for his pistol. He flicked down the safety pin and waited. When the figure crawled clear of the wire and began to look about, he saw that the helmet was American. He lifted his pistol and waited until the figure had crawled forward a little more. He took careful aim and fired.

The shot that killed Dan Stenick also set off the battle for Pointe Ange.

Across the gulley, a good three hundred yards distant, Brad heard the shot. He was lying in a culvert a few feet beneath the wire that hung over the lip of the high ground. He heard the single pistol shot despite the racket of the naval bombardment because his mind had become alert to any sound that would affect his safety. He wondered if the Germans in the pillbox had heard it. He calculated they were eighty yards farther distant from the shot and would not have been listening for it.

He watched the engineers of Urquhart's platoon push three lengths of bangalore pipe through the wire. They were the first

men to reach the lip of the high ground; below them were MG squads and still farther below were Norden's rifle squads. The engineers needed a few more seconds to set the fuses on the bangalores while men below struggled to position their 2-inch mortars that would fire smoke bombs into the open area in front of the pillbox and provide temporary cover for the men who would crash through the gaps blown in the wire.

They didn't get the few additional seconds they needed. In the wake of the single pistol shot across the gulley came a shattering cacophony of rifle, Sten, and machine-gun fire, of bursting grenades, of screams and shouts of command, of wild inhuman yells that pierced the deafening clatter of automatic weapons.

The men of Dog company had rehearsed for such an emergency. On command, the men below abandoned their 2-inch mortars and let fly with their smoke grenades, the 77s, tossing them high over the wire. It seemed an excruciatingly long time before the grenades landed and their smoke billowed up on the open ground. Then the engineers put fire to the fuses of the two bangalores that were primed and ready. There was a wretched, tearing explosion and flame and choking smoke leaped wildly from the gaps flung open in the wire and the men scrambled up over the lip of the high ground and crashed blindly through the gaps.

There were some, confused by the black billowing smoke, who failed to judge the gaps properly. They found themselves entrapped on the wire and tried to pull themselves free and smashed frantically at the wire with their rifle butts and screamed for help from the men beside them who were racing freely through the gaps. A squad leader, a bulky sergeant, paused to work the entrapped men off the wire, working desperately on the wire and bellowing and cursing and commanding the others to get through inside the wire. A sudden gust of wind caught up the smoke and the men on the wire were trapped naked in the rising light. The German machine guns at the slits of the pillbox swung swiftly into range.

The men scrambling up from the defilade heard the screams

of the men hit on the wire. They waited for the smoke from the new hail of 77s to cloud the half light and they knew this was the time to get through to the high ground. This was the only time, for a mortar was working out of the pillbox, in addition to the MG fire, and was dropping antipersonnel shells into the defilade and was taking a terrible toll of the men who were hesitating below the lip. They scrambled past and some were hit but most got through and plunged blindly to the right on the inside of the wire, as they had done in rehearsal. The teams that carried the Brens and LMGs, Urquhart's teams, hurled themselves into the shelter of the merest bulge of ground and set their sights on the pillbox which loomed gray and hazy in the shifting, smoky, uncertain light and on the slits which were punching orange tracer into the gaps in the wire.

The newly organized fire from the Brens and the LMGs concentrated on the slits in the pillbox and the enemy gunners swung away from the gaps in the wire and sought out the men who had broken through.

Now Norden's riflemen flung themselves through the gaps and took up their positions for a right encircling assault on the pillbox. Norden scrambled among his men. A bullet had ripped open his cheek and he was bleeding badly. He cursed. He could count only about twenty men out of the minimum of thirty-five he expected to reach the position. The Germans had widened their field of fire and bullets were ripping the ground all around him. He thought if he didn't get the signal quickly for phase two he wouldn't have even twenty men to make the right encircling assault.

Brad had crashed through the wire with the leading squad. He was on the ground now, crawling like a wary animal behind the men of Urquhart's platoon who were maintaining the covering fire on the slits. It was hard to estimate how many had got through the wire. The light was a thinning, uncertain purple and the waves of smoke stung in his eyes and the inhuman racket of the automatic weapons blunted his brain. He could hear the screams of the wounded piercing the clatter but this

did not touch him except as an estimate of how many men he had left for the final phase. He crawled about behind the perimeter of Urquhart's platoon until he found Urquhart, who was firing a Bren. Urquhart shouted over a body that lay crumpled between them. He shouted, "Go ahead. We're all right. We'll keep their heads down." And Brad shouted, "Watch for the yellow and give us everything."

He crawled around farther to the right where Norden's platoon was positioned. Norden's face was dripping blood and he shouted, "We only got twenty men. I don't count more. Only twenty. Do you hear me? Only twenty." Brad saw that Norden was badly wounded and hysterical. He kept shouting, "Only twenty, God damn it, only twenty. Either we go or we don't!" Brad shouted, "We go. Fire the yellow!" and Norden shouted, "Fire the yellow!" and then someone shot a yellow flare and it seemed to hang for a long moment in the smoke and dust.

This was the signal for maximum fire from Urquhart's men and for smoke bombs to be set off from the mortars below the lip of high ground.

When the new smoke rolled over the open ground, Brad gave the signal and Norden's men advanced to the right in an outflanking movement, seeking to come up against the rear of the pillbox and to blast it open. Norden screamed unintelligible commands and his legs were buckling as he stumbled through the smoke. Brad knew he wasn't going to make it as far as the pillbox and he took command of the men. They advanced through the smoke, keeping well separated, and when the smoke began to thin they flung themselves to the ground. Brad saw they were about fifteen yards from a narrow, cement-lined trench which led to a door at the side of the pillbox. He saw that the door of the pillbox was open, that eight or nine Germans were crouched in the trench peering over their rifles. He saw that two of his men who were lugging the beehive explosive had gone ahead blindly just as they had rehearsed it and he shouted to them to hit the ground.

The Germans in the trench fired and the men lugging the

beehive fell back screaming. In the interminable moment between the time they were hit and the time they fell back screaming, a brutal, chilling, panic-stricken moment, Brad saw that he and his handful of men were trapped in the open, hopelessly trapped, and he thought, This is the way it ends and this is where it ends, here on the pitted ground, and all the things that have gone before are erased and don't count, and all the exercises and the toughness and the unchipped luck, nothing counts. This is the end, the way it's got to be and God! I don't want to die but I'm going to die on this pitted ground. He could see clearly they had no chance against the Germans crouching inside the concrete trench, but he was the leader of the men lying on the ground around him, and a leader must do what he must do, but it was hard, so terribly hard to get off the ground and plunge forward knowing he would be cut down, but he had to do it and he got up off the ground. He saw Norden staggering up from behind, his face stark and bloody as if he had crawled out of a grave, and he screamed, "Hit the ground, Norden!" but Norden didn't stop and he plunged forward together with Norden, and all the men, those that were left, shouted crazily and charged the trench.

He was almost at the trench, not more than three or four yards from it, when he was hit. He could see the face of the German who fired the shot, a pair of young, terrified eyes in an ashen face beneath a helmet, and for a lucid and singular moment the war was between him and the young, terrified German.

It was a moment wrenched out of time, removed from the gun clatter and the animal cries, from the fever of the attack. He had been hit. He knew he had been hit. He wondered why he didn't feel pain. His whole body vibrated with the kickback of the bullets sputtering out of the Sten he held thrust forward in his two hands. He saw the bullets from his Sten strike across the neck and chin of his enemy and he saw the youth's mouth open in an intensely human attitude of indignation. And then the moment was flung back into time and reality and he was

shattered by the racket of the automatic weapons and the shrieking and a convulsion of pain poured through him. He couldn't feel his legs for the fire in his belly, no legs at all, and he toppled as from a great height and was a long time hitting the ground. He saw heavy boots leaping over him and around him and he heard screams of animal rage and terror mixed with the deafening vibration of automatic weapons. A grenade came looping through the air and bounced along the ground away from him. He pulled his arms around his head and tried to burrow into the hard ground. There was an explosion. He felt he was being lifted as if by a hurricane wind and the scorching pain in his belly was overwhelmed by a new anguish as if a thousand hot needles had struck into the side of his body.

He was afraid to move, afraid to discover how badly he had been hit. He lay still but his mind was frantically alive and he listened to the rattle of fire, calculating its direction, and then he heard the thud of a great many boots racing up to him and past him into the trench. Suddenly the firing and the screaming stopped and he heard only deep sobbing moans and he knew the battle was over.

After a time he tried to bring his arms down from their shielding position around his head. Only his right arm would respond. He couldn't feel his left arm except as part of a great area of pain. He rolled over on his back. The first thing he saw was the sky. It was at half dawn, gray and shimmering with a haze of thinning purple. He turned his head and looked along the ground and he saw Norden's bloody face staring at him. Norden was dead. He tried to lift himself by his good arm. He couldn't. He felt the strength running out of him and he thought he had better lie still.

He listened to the soft moans of men around him and to the clatter of the battle across the gulley. He wondered why the battle there wasn't finished. He tried to remember the time schedule for the battle across the gulley but he couldn't remember it. His mind was numb. All he could think of was that he

was alive and that he should fire three red flares to signal to the beach that the battle was over. He moved his good hand along his wounds and it came up warm and dripping blood.

Urquhart leaned over him. "How is it, Brad?"

He said, "Did you fire the three reds?"

"Yes. What hit you?"

"Everything."

"I'll get a medic. Does it hurt?"

Brad said, "Norden's gone."

Urquhart looked over at Norden's body. He gathered up the dead man's helmet and placed it over the bloody face.

Brad said, "How many more gone?"

The lieutenant grimaced and said, "Christ, I don't know. I just don't know. About thirty."

A medic, panting and frowning, ripped away the cloth on Brad's left side, cut open a bag of sulphur, and sprinkled the powder over the blood and the bits of cloth stuck in the blood. He applied a shell dressing and powdered it with more sulphur.

Brad said to Urquhart, "What happened? At the end, I mean."

"They stopped firing when you hit the trench. They turned their gun barrels up out of the slits and we charged over and collected what was left of them. About a dozen—old men and kids. Christ, they were scared. Worse than us."

The medic bandaged his left arm against his side, over the shell dressing, and said, "We'll get you down to the beach soon as we can," and hurried away.

The sulphur burned on his naked wounds. His head whirled with pain and nausea came in waves and was worse than the pain. The rattle of automatic weapons and the crump of mortar shells came from across the gully. The sound seemed to him remote compared with the compulsive clatter of his own action, but he listened to it with a heightening sense of terror for the men who were still in the midst of battle. He thought of John and of Dan and now an awareness of what was happening drove thunderously in on his mind.

"Urquhart!"

The lieutenant was standing against the scorched and blackened pillbox peering across the gully.

"Urquhart!"

This time the lieutenant heard and came to him.

"What's happening across there?"

Urquhart said, "Take it easy. You're not supposed to move. It'll start the bleeding again."

"What's happening across there?"

"Christ, Brad, we can't do a thing about it. They're in trouble and we can't do a goddamn thing. Baker company made it but Charlie didn't. They're pinned down! Christ, what'll happen to Abel?"

Brad thought it was impossible that Charlie company was pinned down. Charlie company was Dan's company. Dan couldn't be pinned down. He said, "What's happening now?"

"It's hard to see. We're laying down smoke." Then the lieutenant said, "I think Abel company's starting to come up."

Across the gully the automatic weapons opened up in a new pitch of fury. Brad shuddered. He held out his good arm and called to Urquhart: "Pull me around and turn me on my stomach."

The lieutenant said, "There's nothing you can do, Brad. You'll start bleeding."

"Please, Urquhart. Do as I say."

The lieutenant turned him over slowly and pivoted him around in a quarter circle. He could feel the bleeding starting up again from the movement of his body. He lifted his head and rested his chin in the crook of his right arm and looked across the gully and he could see the battlefield. Not all of it. But enough.

The gully was a good sixty yards across. The opposite ridge was several yards lower than the height of ground on which he lay and beyond the ridge he could see the dome of the pillbox which was Charley company's objective, only the top curve of the dome, and beyond that was the field of approach.

Mortar smoke billowed thickly over the field. He could see streams of orange tracer driving into the smoke. The tracer was coming from two directions, from the signals casement and from the pillbox that Charley company had failed to capture.

Then a gust of wind from the sea whirled the smoke off the field of approach and laid bare the men of Abel company moving up the middle of the rising ground. He saw John out ahead of his company, a tiny figure in the distance, moving steadily a few yards in advance of his men as if this were the Indian wars and not 1944. He thought, The man's gone out of his mind, he's gone out of his mind like Norden went out of his mind. He's forgotten his assault tactics. You don't walk straight into fire, not this kind of fire. He thought, Where's the smoke? Why don't they lay down more smoke? Where's MacEwen and the reserve platoon? He thought, John is going to die.

Now a new agony seized him and it was like no other agony he had ever known. He thought he had already passed through the ultimate agony, the agony of his own battle, and had triumphed over it and had come away the warrior, the victor, the hero brandishing the prize of life. It wasn't the ultimate agony. He watched John advancing along the rising ground into the streams of tracer and this was the real agony.

Orange tracer enfiladed the field of approach. It was impossible for a man to walk into this stabbing fire. John kept coming on, now running, now weaving, now walking steadily forward up the slope of the ground, and the men of Abel company moved in concert with him. There were those that fell forward or dropped slowly to their knees with the punch of the bullets that hit them, but the rest came on.

Brad watched and the agony stirred afresh inside him and prayers tumbled in and out of his mind and he didn't care any more whether he lived or died. He thought, No man can be so brave. He thought, It's not bravery. He doesn't know what he's doing. It's madness. He thought, If he dies now—oh God, he mustn't die because if he dies, everything dies. He thought, Oh God, don't let him die. Make him stop. Don't let him die.

A salvo of screaming mortars looped over the field from the direction of the signals casement. John fell flat and the men behind him fell flat and black smoke rose in billows all over the field of approach. The smoke of the mortars cleared and John was on his feet in a crouch, but the men behind still lay flat on the ground. John looked back at them and drew himself erect and still the men lay flat on the ground. He took off his helmet and waved it over his head and moved forward, and now the men, those who were not cut down by the mortar and the bullets, scrambled to their feet and charged wildly to the crest of the high ground.

Brad dropped his head into the curve of his arm. The battle had passed out of the line of his vision, beneath the opposite ridge of the gully. He heard a new surge of clatter from the automatic weapons and he thought, He's going to die and everything will die with him.

The clangor of battle came across the gully in convulsive waves. The cries of men intermingled with the crump of grenades and the sputter of small automatic weapons. Brad crushed his face into the ground.

He heard Urquhart cry out, "Charlie company's moving. And MacEwen's coming up with the reserve. He's coming up fast! They're going to make it, Brad! God Almighty, they're going to make it!"

The sound of savagery rose up from across the gully. Brad felt his wounds throbbing and bleeding freely. He didn't care. The agony that racked him was deeper than his wounds.

Gradually the crump and the clatter and the inhuman shrieking died out. After a little time three red flares looped up over the battlefield and Urquhart gasped, "They made it! Holy God, they made it! They made it, Brad!" He repeated it again and again as if he didn't believe it and had to convince himself.

Brad brought his head up from the ground and looked across the gully to the section of field within his line of vision. He saw thin curls of smoke rising from patches of ground where the mortars and grenades had set the grass afire and men trudg-

ing inquisitively among the bodies and some of the men bending down and peering into the faces of the dead. He saw that full dawn had broken and the sky was overcast and darkly gray. He thought, This is the way it should be, gray and sad. He thought, It's over and John is dead. We've won, we've captured the signals casement, we've made it easier for them on the beaches but John is dead.

A medic came up herding two German prisoners who carried a stretcher. The Germans were bareheaded, their tunics torn and caked with dirt.

The medic said, "Okay, Captain, we'll take you down now."

Brad said, "Take the others down first."

22

HE lay on the ground, his chin propped in the crook of his good arm, and he watched the quiet, smoldering battlefield across the gully. Stretcher-bearers were carrying wounded down from the area of the pillboxes, moving carefully over the blackened and pitted ground. He watched each stretcher party until it passed below the ridge. There were a lot of dead but there were also a lot of wounded. He tried to believe John was among those who survived. He dared not ask Urquhart to find out, for he couldn't bear knowing the truth if it was a bad truth. He thought he had better lie still awhile not knowing. He remembered John saying *I was never much good at anything before the war and I imagine I'll be a rank failure after it's over, so a chap does what he can when he feels he's of some use*. This was part of the agony, remembering how John said it, knowing why he said it.

A flight of P-51s thundered out of the sky behind him and passed over the high ground only a few yards above where he lay. He could count the rows of rockets poised on the underside of their wings. He followed their course as they bore down on the flat beaches far below to the west. He watched their rockets

strike a crazy pattern of fire on the casements facing the white, deserted beaches and then he looked out to sea. The dawn mists had lifted from the Channel and revealed the invasion fleet lying about a mile off the shore line and stretching as far down the coast as his eyes could see in the gray, squally morning.

The assault had not yet begun. The mammoth guns of the battleships still hurled their 16-inch shells in a thunderous tattoo against the casements, the pillboxes, and the gray buildings along the shore line. Now in full daylight they were joined by destroyers that tore in landward of the assault ships, raced daringly parallel to the beaches, and ripped fire into the German batteries. The Flying Fortresses, squadron following squadron, dropped out of the overcast and roared low over the beaches. Anti-aircraft shells bit into the sky, exploded into fire, and dissolved in black curls of smoke. But the Forts kept coming in and each wave obliterated the beaches in heavy smoke cut through with searing plumes of multicolored flame and when the pall lifted the German batteries were still firing.

He studied the wretched and fascinating panorama and he thought how hard it was to kill a man, how much fire and steel was required, how tough and resistant was human flesh and human spirit.

After a time Urquhart came up beside him. The medic and the two Germans were with him. He said, "We're taking you down."

The Germans opened the stretcher and laid it on the ground beside him.

He said to Urquhart, "Were you down on the beach?"

"Yes."

"How bad?"

Urquhart said, "Hellish." He looked away and said, "Charlie company. There's no more'n ten-fifteen left of Charlie company."

Brad said, "Dan?"

"Dan's gone. We're taking you down. You're bleeding bad."

He thought about it. He could bear Dan being dead. Dan was like a gambling man who wins or loses and when he loses it's

LIONEL SHAPIRO

bad but you can bear it. He would always remember Dan winking out of his rough, happy face but he could bear Dan being dead.

He said, "What about Waller?"

"Not a scratch."

"And MacEwen?"

"He got creased on the head but he's walking."

The medic laid a blanket on the ground beside him and said, "We'll turn you over on your back. Don't strain. It'll make the bleeding worse. Relax."

They rolled him over on the blanket and the two prisoners and the medic and Urquhart took hold of the corners and lifted him on the stretcher.

He thought it was no use waiting. He would know when they brought him down to the beach. He said, "What about the colonel?"

Urquhart said, "It's a funny thing about the colonel. He took three bullets, one in the neck, but they tell me down below he might make it."

They took a long time getting him down through the defilade. The medic cursed the prisoners and the prisoners panted and grumbled in German.

The medics had set up their dressing station on the sand at the base of an overhanging cliff and they had rigged several sections of heavy canvas jutting out of the rock to break the wind that was blowing across the narrow beach.

They placed his stretcher on the ground between two sections of canvas. There were four or five other stretchers in the same space and one of the men was moaning and sobbing. A medic gave him an injection of penicillin and changed the dressings and made him swallow two big white pills.

This was the senior medic, a W/O called Blake whom he knew well, and he asked him about the colonel. Blake said, "You wouldn't think a skinny guy like that was so tough. Three bullets and he's going to make it."

The pills made him drowsy. About noon an LSI came in from

the sea and let its ramp down on the beach near where he lay. His stretcher was carried through the gaping mouth of the ship and set down with a lot of other stretchers in a dark passageway below decks. He was very weak and sleepy but he heard the rumble of the engines pulling them off the beach.

"I have also to announce to the House," Mr. Churchill said in the hushed chamber of the Commons, "that during the night and the early hours of this morning, the first of a series of landings in force upon the European continent has taken place. In this case the liberating assault fell upon the coast of France. An immense armada of upwards of 4000 ships together with several thousand smaller craft crossed the Channel. Massed airborne landings have been successfully effected behind the enemy lines and landings on the beaches are proceeding at various points at the present time . . ."

23

HE CAME slowly out of the narcotic. He floated between sleep and wakefulness in that light and lovely mood when neither his bandaged body nor his mind had yet made contact with reality. It was all so fine he loathed to open his eyes. He sensed from the quality of light that came through his closed eyelids that they hadn't lifted the shade on the window behind his bed. Or perhaps it was night. Anyway, he sensed it was a cool, restful light and he opened his eyes a little. His head was twisted, lying on one ear, and he saw the creases of the white muslin on the screen which had been placed around his bed.

He remembered they placed the screen around his bed when they gave him the narcotic and changed the dressings, though he didn't know why the screen was necessary. The men in the beds on either side of him were amputation cases and for days they hadn't looked anywhere except up at the ceiling.

His ear began to hurt, the one he was lying on, and he turned his head.

Then he thought he saw her. He had often seen her sitting in just that position on the side of his bed, looking down at him with a half-sweet, half-anxious smile which was his favorite way of seeing her, but it had always turned out to be his imagination. The narcotic was still whirling deliciously in his mind and he wondered if she was real this time. He wished the arm that was bound and the wound in his stomach weren't on the side of the bed where she was sitting. If she was on the other side of the bed he could get his good arm from under the covers and touch her to see if she was real this time.

He made an effort to open his eyes a little wider. She was still there and the smile on her face hadn't changed.

He said, "Please take off your cap."

She said, "Brad——" and took off her cap and he saw the red and gold flecks on her hair. Then she put her hand on his cheek and he felt it cool and soft and he came fully awake and she was really there.

He lay looking at her for a long time, knowing she was really there. He could think of nothing nicer to do than look at her, especially at her eyes which were deep and brown and so shining he could almost feel their warmth.

He said, "Could you come to the other side of the bed?" She did and when she touched his face this time he was able to feel the length of her arm with the fingers of his good hand.

He said, "How long have you been here?"

"About an hour," she said softly as if the sound of her voice might disturb him.

Now the narcotic was running out and the pain began to throb, but his mind was clearing and he didn't care about the pain. He said, "You've been here before."

"Yes. Yesterday and the day before that. You were asleep."

"I saw you. I remember seeing you and thinking 'She'll be back.' I knew you'd come."

"Of course I was coming back."

He said, "You've changed."

"I haven't changed."

"I mean your face."

She said, "My face hasn't changed, my darling, and I haven't changed."

"I mean from the last time. At the station. Remember?"

"I remember. I must have been terribly ugly."

He said, "You could never be ugly."

"My war began that night. It's over now. That's why I look different to you."

She saw that he was puzzled and she said, "We all fight two wars, my darling. The big war and our own."

He said, "And yours is over."

"The days and nights of not knowing and wanting to die. That's over."

He closed his eyes and tried to surrender to the trace of narcotic that still drifted in his brain. Then he thought it was no use and he opened his eyes. He said, "How is John?"

"He's coming along splendidly."

"Will he be as good as new?"

She said, "Good as new."

"Why are you crying?"

"Am I crying, my darling?"

"Yes."

"It's the way you asked—the way you asked about John."

He looked at the ceiling. He didn't want to watch her fighting back her tears. He said, "You don't know what happened there."

"John told me."

"He wouldn't tell you. Not John. Anyway, he doesn't know—not everything."

She said, "Then you tell me."

He kept looking at the ceiling. He said, "I saw him going in and I couldn't believe it. Not into that cross fire—not standing up—and I thought *Oh God, he wants to die. He's going in because he wants to die.* That's when his men were pinned down and he waved his helmet and advanced. I remember thinking *No man is this brave. He wants to die. He's asking for it.* And

then I remember thinking *Oh God, he mustn't die. If he dies, everything dies.* It was as if I was praying for my life. I didn't see much difference then. You can't understand, Val, you weren't there, you can't know how it was. And when he didn't die—when he didn't die——”

He felt her fingers on his mouth and her face dug into the pillow. The wet of her tears was cold on his cheek.

He couldn't see her. He felt her breath against his face. She said, “And when he didn't die, you thought—let me hear what you thought,” and her fingers came away from his mouth.

He gave an anguished shake of his head. “You knew a long time ago. You knew that night at the station.”

She said, “I began to know.”

After a time she came up off the pillow. Her eyes were glazed and lustrous, sad and yet not sad.

He said, “Am I still in your blood?”

“You'll always be in my blood.”

“I won't stop loving you, Val.”

“Don't ever, my darling.”

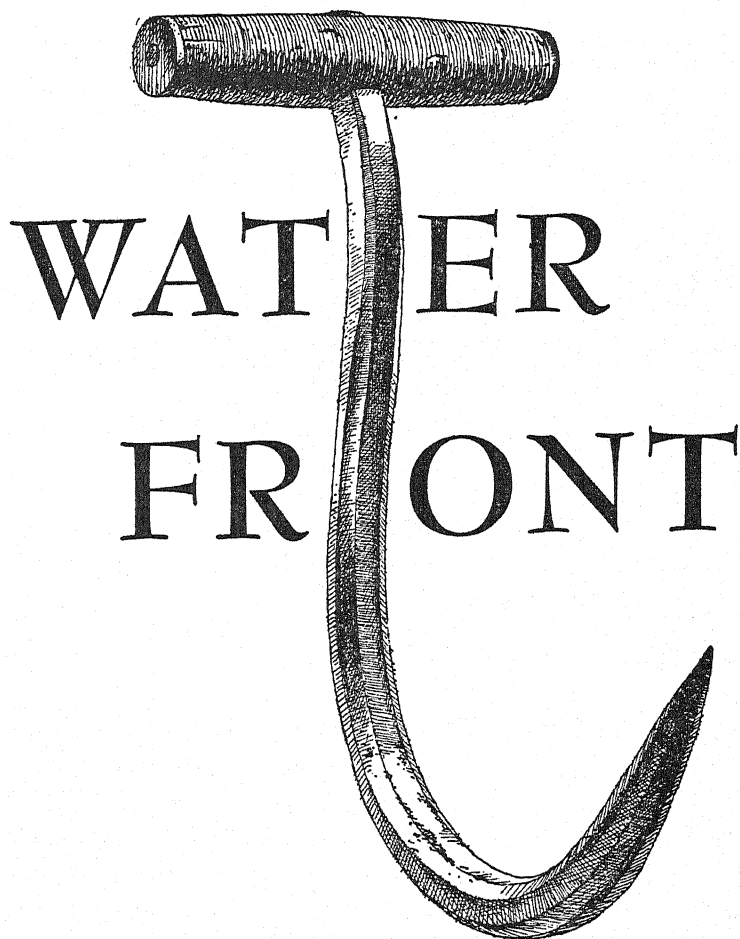
They looked at each other a little while and then an orderly barged in and folded up the screens and carried them away. A nurse came to his bedside and looked at her wrist watch and significantly at Valerie. She said, “There now, Captain, you look fine. Won't be long now and you'll be away home in a nice, new hospital ship. That should perk you up.” She looked at her watch once more and significantly at Valerie and went away.

He said, “You used to say the war will make it right, God knows how but the war will make it right. It didn't.”

She said, “We can't know.”

Her face became anguished and she said, “Turn your head away.” He knew she was leaving and he turned his head away slowly but not for long and when he looked for her she was at the end of the passage between the beds. She was standing there with her back to the beds. He watched her standing there a little time and he was glad she didn't turn around before she walked quickly out of the ward.

BUDD SCHULBERG'S



AN ABRIDGEMENT

The Author

BUDD SCHULBERG grew up in Hollywood and also worked there as a reader, junior writer and "utility outfielder." His first novel, *What Makes Sammy Run?*, was a national best-seller, as was his second, *The Disenchanted*. Mr. Schulberg and his family live on a farm in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, where, he says, "the livestock consists chiefly of a few children, pigs, etc."

WATERFRONT—Budd Schulberg

Published by Random House, Inc.

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One

ACROSS THE Hudson River from the grubby harbor town of Bohegan little squares of light were coming on all over the seaport metropolis. In the cities clustered around the harbor were men crowded together in the subways, men going home from work. But the workday on the river had no end.

Along one of the Bohegan docks a Portuguese freighter bound for Lisbon was working under lights, the winches humming and growling, and the longshoremen, fifty- and sixty-year-old Irishmen and Italians proudly able to keep up with the younger men, the thirty-year-olds out of World War II with wide shoulders and muscular arms and paunches not as big from beer as they were going to be after twenty years of bellying up to the bar after the shift or while waiting—the interminable waiting for work. Here in Bohegan—when they weren't short-ganged—they worked in teams of twenty-two, eight in the hold, eight on the dock, four on the deck, along with a couple of high-low drivers, and they knew each other's rhythms and ways like fellow-members of a football team. They worked at a regular, easy, knowing pace, making the most dangerous work in America—more fatalities than even the mines—look safe and casual.

Loading and unloading is an art and a fever. The dock boss is on you all the time. Unload, load and turn 'er around. The faster she puts a cargo down and picks up another, well, that's where the money is. Do a three-day job in two and there's your profit. Legitimate profit, that is. Oh, there's plenty of the other kind for the mob who's got the local and the Bohegan piers in its pocket. More ways to skin this fat cat than you ordinary citizens would ever dream. You take sixteen billion dollars' worth of cargo moving in and out all over the harbor every year and if the boys siphon off maybe sixty million of it in pilferage,

shakedown, kickbacks, bribes, short-gangs, numbers, trumped-up loading fees and a dozen other smart operations, why, who cares—the shipping companies? Not so you could notice it. The longshoremen? Most of them are willing just to keep working. The city fathers? That's a joke on the waterfront.

At the river's edge on the Bohegan side in the shadow of a great ocean liner at Pier B and an Egyptian freighter at Pier C, was a two-room boathouse that had belonged to the Bohegan Yacht Club in some distant, more elegant past. For years now Bohegan had been a working town, a waterfront commerce town and—it figures—a two-bit politician's town. Now the Bohegan Yacht Club was inhabited by sportsmen of another stripe. A sign over the door read Longshoremen's Local 447. Everyone knew what 447 stood for in Bohegan. Johnny Friendly.

Johnny Friendly was president of the local, and vice-president, secretary, treasurer and delegate, for that matter, though he had some of his boys filling those slots. More than that he was a vice-president of the Longshoremen's District Council. More than that he was the way you got and kept a job in this section of the waterfront. And then even more than that, Johnny Friendly had a better than nodding acquaintance with Tom McGovern, a man whose power was so great that his name was only a whisper on the waterfront. Mr. Big they called him in the press and in the bars, some fearing libel from his battery of Wall Street lawyers, others simply fearing for their lives and limbs. Mr. Big, Big Tom to his remarkable spectrum of friends, was a dear friend of the Mayor's, not just the joker pushed into the Bohegan City Hall by the Johnny Friendly votes, the Hudson-American and Inter-State (McGovern) Stevedore Company, but the Mayor of the big town itself. And while Johnny Friendly had these Bohegan piers in his pocket and was frequently described as doing very lovely, Tom McGovern had a whole brace of Johnny Friendlys from Brooklyn to Bohegan, north of Hoboken on the Jersey shore.

Johnny Friendly had the build of a two-hundred-year-old oak cut off a few inches short of six feet. He was big in the shoulders

and he had strong arms and legs from his longshoremen days. He was what they call a black Irishman. Johnny Friendly was never alone, except when he slept. He moved with his boys and they were as much a part of him as the hundred legs of a centipede. A king in pre-constitutional days never had more power than Johnny Friendly, McGovern's fief, had along the docks and deep into Bohegan.

Right now Johnny Friendly's emotional state was pushing zero. His patience, of which he liked to think he had a great store, was all used up. That Doyle kid. That fresh-nosed little son-of-a-bitchin' Doyle kid. Troublemaker. It seemed to run in the family. The uncle, Eddie, used to go around with petitions and stuff like that way back when the local was just getting started. They had fixed Eddie Doyle's wagon and roughed up Joey's old man a little bit. Old man Doyle seemed to have learned his lesson.

For years now he had gone along with the set-up, content to pick up his two three days and his forty fifty dollars a week. Pop Doyle was all right. Johnny Friendly didn't mind him. But this wet-behind-the-ears pink-faced kid of his. Two years in the Navy and he comes out a regular sea lawyer: The constitution of the local calls for bi-monthly meetings. How do you like that, in the small print he finds bi-monthly. The kid has the nerve to actually go read the Constitution. Well, we gave them their meeting. We called it on twenty-four-hours' notice after posting it on the bulletin board here in the office. Sure the notice was on a scrap of paper one inch high but the Constitution doesn't say what kind of notice; it just says adequate notice must be given. I gave them their adequate. Only about fifty showed up. Fifty out of a possible fifteen hundred. And half of them was ours. You know, especially loyal members of 447. We all got elected for four more years. This Joey Doyle put up a squawk and Truck whose neck is as wide as some men's shoulders, Truck had to take him outside and quiet him down. He's a tough monkey, Joey Doyle. Doesn't look it, but he's there with the moxie and this trade-union bug has got him bad. Like his Uncle Eddie

before him he's hard to discourage. And then comes the clincher. The Governor's got a bunch of stiffes he calls the State Crime Commission investigating waterfront crime. Well, of course, it's for laughs. Who's going to go blabbing to that bunch of striped-pants? Only we start hearing things about Joey Doyle. He's been seen going in and out of the Court House where they sit. I'm patient. On the District Council, ask anyone, they'll tell you I'm one of the saner heads. I don't go off half-cocked. Before I move Joey out of my way with muscle I look to con him out of my way with some soft soap. For that I've got Charley Malloy. Charley aint called the Gent for nothing. He's got a lot better education than the rest of us got. He did two years in Fordham, believe it or no.

Charley talks sense. He says he likes Joey and wants to help him, which he does. There might even be a place in the set-up for a bright kid like Joey. We don't hold grudges. I've taken in plenty guys who started in bucking me. It shows they got spirit. I can use spirit. But when Charley comes back with no dice and the scuttlebutt has the Doyle punk blowing his nose for the Crime Commission, which no respectable longshoreman would be caught dead in their company, what am I supposed to do, hang a medal on him? I worked too hard for what I got to frig around with a cheese-eater. Know what I mean?

So Johnny and Charley, a waterfront idea of suavity and culture, worked up a little plan. Its virtue lay in its simplicity. No telltale firearms, not even the usual splash in the river. In the office on the creaky floating dock on the river's edge, Johnny went over the plans with Charley and Sonny and Specs, who were providing the muscle. Johnny wasn't like a lot of the Irish mob, hit 'em first and think afterwards. He had been raised with a lot of Italians and he liked to do his jobs a little more in the Sicilian manner. A certain finesse.

"Okay, Matooze," he said to Charley, "go get the kid brother, put 'im to work." Matooze was Johnny's name for anybody he liked. Nobody knew where it came from or what it meant. All you had to know was you were in pretty good shape if he called

you Matooze. But if he called you Shlagoom, then you better look out. Charley had seen many a bum turn sickly white at the sound of that *shlagoom*.

Johnny followed Charley up the gangplank to the shore with his arm on his shoulder. Charley was a very natty dresser. He had his overcoats made to order. He wore a camel's hair that was really a beaut.

"Okay, Matooze," Johnny said again. "I'll be over at the joint." That was the Friendly Bar, a little farther up River Street. Johnny's brother-in-law Leo ran it for him. There was as much business done there as in the union office itself. The horse play and the numbers and a lot of the kickback and of course the loan sharking, that all went on in the bar. The back room was Johnny's second home.

Charley the Gent said see ya Johnny, and then turned toward the row of tenements one block in from the river.

It was growing darker but a lot of kids were hollering up a stickball game in the street. On the stoop some of the older ones were idly watching. Old man Doyle was there, with a can of beer in his hand, and with him, almost like a human appendage, was Runty Nolan, a jockey-sized, little gnome of a man barely five feet tall, with a face that had been hammered out of its original cast for thirty years of talking back. Not a young, up-to-date, Navy-wise, modern-trade-union-minded oppositionist like Joey Doyle but an incorrigible gadfly, a born needler, a party of one who fought Johnny Friendly in his own thick Irish way, by laughing at him, stinging him with humorous darts. A charter member of 447, in the days when Tom McGovern and Willie Givens were young dockwallopers working in the same gang, Runty accepted his beatings as part of a great joke he was playing on McGovern and Givens. "Those bums I knew 'em when they was glad to steal a chop off'n a meat truck," he'd laugh, reading in the papers that McGovern had been appointed chairman of some kind of new port committee, or that Givens had just been voted twenty-five thousand a year for life plus expenses.

Runty as usual had a comfortable load on, and Pop Doyle was enjoying his beer quietly, also as usual, a man whose gentle face was lined and hardened with the hard years, slightly stooped in the shoulders and back from thirty years of bending over the coffee bags and the heavy boxes, dreaming a long time ago of a better deal for the men on the docks, but tired now, his sweet wife under the ground and something of his manhood and nerve buried with her.

"Well, if it aint Brother Malloy," Runty spoke up with the irrepressible laugh in his voice that years of heavy blows had failed to silence.

"Hello, boys," Charley said affably.

Careful not to let his resplendent camel's hair coat touch the dirty door or the walls of the tenement hallway, Charley entered the dim entrance to the railroad flats and plodded up the stairway to the roof.

Two

IT WAS possible to walk along the rooftops of the tenements all the way from Dock Street to Ferry Street. In recent years these rooftops had sprouted television aerials in abundance, and between the aerials there were clothes lines. And on almost every roof at least one pigeon coop, for pigeon racing was still a favorite sport in Bohegan, offering as it did a chance to extend yourself above and beyond the brick and mortar confines of the slum.

At the top of the stairs leading from the fourth floor onto the roof Charley stood a moment, watching his younger brother at the edge of the roof with a long pole in his hand. At the end of the pole, like a makeshift flag of surrender, was an eight-inch strip from an old sheet, designed to frighten the birds into staying aloft for their training exercise. Around and around they

flew in a great fluttering circle, winging out over the river and swinging around in a quarter-mile arc to cast their fifty-mile-an-hour shadows over the tenement buildings, over the bars and the shabby seamen's hotels and the slummy streets.

Pigeons, Charley was thinking, kid stuff. Why doesn't he grow up? He's twenty-eight years old already. Charley had to hustle and use his head. And he looked out for the kid, Terry, when he could. Only how much could you do for a kid like this, flapping his silly pole at a bunch of silly birds? And a couple of neighborhood kids in bluejeans and basketball jackets with block letters spelling out "Golden Warriors" on their backs, a brace of reform-school candidates called Billy Conley and Jo-Jo Delaney, helping Terry with the birds and looking up to him as if he were something big and not just Terry Malloy, an ex-pug who had had it for a little while and now was only accepted by the big men in the neighborhood because he had the good fortune to be the brother of Charley the Gent.

Charley came up behind Terry and spoke softly, but the unexpected presence startled the kid—as most people still called him—and he pivoted quickly.

"Oh, Charley, I didn' hear ya come up."

He lowered his pole and the leader of his flock, a firm-looking blue-checker full of its importance, circled in for a landing on the roof of the coop, the others following him smoothly.

Charley looked at the birds, bored. "Kids, vamoose," he told the two Warriors. "I want to talk private with Terry."

The boys withdrew and Charley came to the point of his visit: "They"—which could be anybody from Johnny Friendly down—wanted to talk to Joey Doyle. But Joey had been playing it cute. Ever since his trips to the Crime Commission, when he spotted Sonny tailing him, he had never gone out at night except with two or three young, tough longshoremen for protection. Johnny wanted to get Joey alone. It was highly important they should talk to him. Before Joey went and did something very foolish. Now Charley had an idea. Joey Doyle raised pigeons too. For years there had been a friendly rivalry between

him and Terry. A friendly piracy. There was the old trick of tying a piece of ribbon to your homer's leg. A pigeon is incorrigibly curious. Sometimes a bird from a strange or rival loft would follow that ribbon right into your own coop. Terry had picked up some nice birds that way. Army birds and prize stuff off their course. In every long-distance race hundreds of birds were lost. Sometimes they followed others home.

"—I figured if you call up to him you got one of his pigeons, you could get him to come up on the roof so a couple of the boys could have a little talk with him," Charley said. "Now get on it. And don't goof it up. It's important to Johnny, highly important. Tell 'im you'll meet him on the roof and then cut over to the joint. I'll be waiting for you."

"Okay, okay," Terry said heavily.

The immaculate camel's hair coat disappeared into the stairwell.

Terry reached into his coop, expertly, and grabbed the nearest of his birds. He placed the bird inside his black-and-red checked windbreaker. That goddamn 447, he thought. Sooner or later they got into everything, even into this flock of pigeons which were his alone.

Three

IN AN OPEN courtyard used by a dozen tenements as a handy place for their empty cans and old papers, Terry stood looking up at Doyle's window. Inside his jacket the pigeon felt nice and peaceful. He wished he didn't have to call Joey out. He got along pretty good with Joey. It was hard to figure a kid like that getting in all this trouble. Getting himself marked lousy in Johnny and Charley's book. An agitator. Talking in the bars about all the things he found wrong with the union.

One time, listening to Joey shoot his mouth, Terry finally asked, "What's in it for you, Joey? That's what I can't figure. You're only twenny-three four years old. You're a good worker. You could get all the work you want if you'd only keep your mouth shut. Why worry about a lot of washed-up stumblebums? Why don'cha look out for you?"

And Joey had answered, "There's a right and a wrong, Terry. Takin' over our union and runnin' it with a pistol like Johnny's doin', that's wrong. And if more fellas had some guts down here they'd stand up and holler it's wrong."

This Joey Doyle must be crazy. Talk like that wasn't healthy. A nice, clean-looking kid, but with a noggin full of the kind of ideas that can get you hit in the head.

Under Joey's window Terry cupped his hands to his mouth and hollered, "Hey Joey, Joey Doyle!"

Three stories up a window opened and Joey peered over the sill, cautiously.

"Terry? Whaddya want, Terry?"

Terry reached into his windbreaker and held up the bird. "Ya see this," he shouted. "He's one o'yours. I recognized the band. He followed my birds into their coop. I'll bring him up to the roof. Meet ya at yer loft."

The pigeons were the peaceful and satisfactory part of Joey Doyle's life, as they were of Terry's, and the sight of the sleek, firm bird in Terry's hand, and the mention of the loft were reassuring. "Okay, okay," Joey said, "I'll see ya on the roof."

As Joey Doyle turned away from the window, Terry took a couple of backward steps and released his hold on the pigeon. It flew aimlessly upward. On the roof Terry could see the silhouette of a couple of hulking business suits waiting for their quarry in the dark. They were a couple of pistols, Sonny and Specs, and he hoped they wouldn't give Joey too much of a hard time. He brushed his fingers against his nose, boxer style, and started walking in his rolling, light-footed, shoulder-shifting way toward the Friendly Bar and Grill.

Four

THERE WAS nothing special about the Friendly Bar; it looked like most of the other gin mills along the street: a plate-glass window with a green blind running half way up so the wives couldn't spot their truant husbands; a beautiful old bar, exquisitely carved in the old rococo manner, surrounded incongruously by unscrubbed walls of corrugated brown sheet metal decorated with pictures of fighters, ball players and calendar nudes. A few humorous signs—"In God We Trust—No Exceptions"—"Ladies, Watch Your Language. There May Be Gentlemen Present"—and a Back Room for the big and little wheels, that was Friendly's, a deceptively unimposing command post for the Bohegan sector of the harbor.

Johnny Friendly (through his stooge brother-in-law Leo) didn't pay any rent for the street corner outside the Bar and Grill, but it was considered an integral part of the establishment. There were always half a dozen or a dozen or more of the Friendly boys standing around, leaning against the plate-glass window or the lamppost, talking shop or sports or doing a little business. "J.P." Morgan, bat-eared and weasel-faced, was a familiar figure on the corner as longshoremen sullenly accepted his loans of fifty or a hundred, to be paid back at the generous rate of ten per cent a week, which didn't sound too bad until you remembered the ten per cent was accumulative, and that if you failed to come up with the hundred the first week, the interest was ten per cent of \$110 and so on and on until you were paying thirty or forty per cent. If you fell too far behind "J.P." would signal a hiring boss, Big Mac McGown or Socks Thomas, to put you to work. The debtor would turn over his work tab to "J.P." and "J.P." would collect straight from the pay office, so there was no chance of the guy drinking it up or turning it over to the wife before "J.P." (really Johnny Friendly) got his. So

one way to be sure to work (eventually) was to co-operate with "J.P." Morgan's street-corner banking system.

Outside the Friendly Bar and Grill when Terry appeared Charley was leaning against the bar window, flanked by Truck Amon and Gilly Connors.

When Terry was close enough, Charley said in his habitually soft voice, "How goes?"

Terry nodded impatiently. "He's on the roof."

As Terry looked at his brother questioningly, wishing he could figure what was on his mind, a sound came to his ears that was the most terrifying he had ever heard. It was a scream, such as might have been torn from the bloody throat of a savage animal being ripped apart by fiercer beasts. It was a scream, a cry, a protest, a farewell, a shrill, hoarse, descending wail, choked with agony.

"I'm afraid somebody fell offa roof," Truck Amon said looking from Gilly to Charley for appreciation of his wit.

The barflies were pouring out of Friendly's in the direction of the scream and the sickening, thudding punctuation that had ended it. Suddenly Terry saw what they had done to him. He had been a decoy, like the pigeon, as ignorant and almost as innocent.

Around the corner there was an increasing babel of voices. A police car sired in.

Terry said to Charley quietly, more befuddled than accusing, "You said they was only gonna talk to him? Try to straighten 'im out. I thought they was only gonna talk to him?"

Terry's was less a question than an awkward searching of himself.

"Maybe he gave 'em an argument," Charley suggested. He said it in a way intended to cut off further discussion. Terry was a funny kid.

"Just work 'im over a little, that's what I figgered," Terry was muttering. "He wasn't a bad little fella, that Joey."

Charley saw the look on Terry's face and figured he better get

the kid away from Truck and Gilly. "Come on, kid, I'll buy you a drink," Charley offered, sliding his arm over Terry's shoulder.

"You go in. I'll be in in a minute. I wanna get some air," Terry said, ashamed to be caught soft in front of Charley.

Charley hesitated for a moment and then turned toward the entrance, giving Truck and Gilly the eye to follow him in.

With his mind full of confusion, Terry watched the stream of people, longshoremen, truckers, wives and kids and drifters, moving in the direction of the accident.

Five

IN THE clearing behind the row of tenements at least fifty people had gathered around the heap of inert bone and flesh and crumpled clothing that had been Joey Doyle. Their heads were bent in the age-old attitude of grief, in this case genuine grief, for Joey had been a popular kid before developing into a respected neighborhood figure.

Pop Doyle stood with his friends, Runty Nolan and big, bull-voiced Moose McGonigle. They knew the whole story of Joey Doyle and they also knew the narrow, twisting paths of waterfront survival. So they weren't saying anything. The three of them stood mute and guarded near the body.

As always, the city had put smoothly into motion its machinery for handling personal tragedy. Joe Regan, the cop on the beat, had called for the ambulance while Mrs. Geraghty, a neighbor, had sent her boy running for Father Barry over at St. Timothy's, a block and a half away. The intern and the young parish priest had arrived only minutes apart. As Father Barry was praying for God's mercy and the gift for Joey Doyle of a life everlasting, the intern was telling Regan, the cop, to

pencil his report D.O.A. Another Dead on Arrival from River Street.

Regan had asked a few routine questions of the onlookers—had anyone seen the fall and did anyone know whether young Doyle had been alone on the roof?—questions that had to be asked to cover Regan in case he was checked. Then, for the same reason, because it looked like an accident but probably wasn't, he sent for the homicide squad.

They drove up a little later, a pair of first-grade detectives who took over, especially the older man Foley, a fatgut who had started out doing a job on these waterfront cases until his captain had straightened him out. The neighbors were watching warily as Lieutenant Foley turned to Pop Doyle.

"You're Doyle, aren't you? The boy's father?"

Pop stared at him, angry behind his mask. "That's right."

"Would your son usually've been up on the roof at this time of night?"

Pop shrugged. "Once in a while. He'd be up there with his boids."

"Any idea whether he was alone or not?"

"How should I know? I wasn't up there."

Mrs. Collins was pushing forward to have her say. She was a thin, nervous and overworked woman in her early thirties whose husband had been a hatch boss fished out of the river in the late 40's. "Billy Conley and Jo-Jo Delaney are up on the roof all the time. Maybe they could tell you something about it."

Pop glared at her. Helping cops was a waterfront taboo, no matter how you felt about the bums who muscled your union. "Buttinsky, you keep outa this," he told her harshly.

"Any ideas, Pop?" Foley said again. "Any suspicions? Anything like that?"

"None," Pop said.

Mrs. Collins pushed forward again. "It's the same thing they did to my Andy five years ago."

Pop wheeled on her. Busybody. All of them. Why couldn't

they leave him alone with his heartache and his kid? All these questions and people poking their noses in. For what? Another whitewash. "You shut up," he told Andy Collins' widow. "You keep your big yap outa this."

Mrs. Collins glared at everybody. She was always talking about her Andy and the thing they did to him five years ago. He had been a hatch boss on Pier C who hadn't forgotten his years with a hook in his hand for one-thirty-seven an hour. He liked to give the men a break. Johnny Friendly had warned him, but he wouldn't play. Beaten him up, but he kept on. There was talk he was ready to buck the outfit and try to take over the local and run it like a union. Mrs. Collins was a little out of her head on the subject. "Every time I hear a key in the door I think it's him comin' home," she'd keep saying. Pop Doyle could shout at her all he wanted. She was going to have her say.

"Joey Doyle was the only one with the guts to talk up for his rights around here. He was for holdin' regular meetin's. An' he was the only one with the moxie to talk up to them Crime Investigators. So this whole stinkin' mess could . . ."

"Shet up!" Pop was trembling, the pain of his loss meshed in with his rage and frustration. "Shut ya trap. If Joey had taken that advice he wouldn't be . . ."

Pop looked at what was left of Joey Doyle and turned away. The whistle of another ocean liner went WHOOM WHOOM WHOOOOOOM on the river. In his mind the river and Johnny Friendly were one, endlessly dangerous and never sleeping.

Lieutenant Foley had had enough of Pop. He turned to Moose McGonigle and Runty Nolan, and made a few routine notes.

The whole thing was routine. Everybody knows and nobody says. "Okay, you c'n take it in," he said to the intern. "Another D.O.A."

Six

IT WAS AFTER ten o'clock, but the kids on Market Street were still playing in the misty light of the sidewalk lamps. The ball bounced back into the street and a sweaty-faced twelve-year-old pursued it almost under the wheels of a taxi that had suddenly turned the corner. A cab pulling up to a tenement doorway was an occasion. Before Joey's sister, Katie Doyle, could step out of the cab the kids had bunched themselves around the door, pressing for a look at her, like the teenage fans of movie stars. Aside from her connection with her brother Joey, she was something of a celebrity in the neighborhood, because as a freshman at Marygrove College, up in Tarrytown, she had made an unusual break with the younger set of Bohegan. She was a quiet, perhaps over-serious girl, sent off to school at the delicate age of twelve because Pop Doyle had been determined, to the point of obsession, to keep her off the streets and out of the trouble the best of pretty girls can stumble into on the Bohegan riverfront.

Katie had adored Joey, almost to the point of distraction, and now she seemed totally enclosed within her loss. Still faint from the shock of the phone call that had pierced the seclusive barriers of Marygrove and pulled her back to Market Street and the terrible events that darkened the river, she walked into the worn, familiar hallway and straight up the stairs to the third-story where the lights of the Doyle flat were burning.

A half dozen people could give the Doyle flat a sense of being overcrowded and now there were at least twice that many present: Pop in his underwear shirt, and Runty and Moose passing the bottle, and a roomer from across the hall, Mr. Mathewson, and Jimmy Sharkey, a young friend of Joey's. There was also Mrs. Gallagher, a motherly neighbor, making sandwiches of ham and cornbeef and cheese. And there was Uncle Frank, a

sergeant on the Force, a plump, red-faced, kindly man, who for some mysterious reason had never married. It was a cross-section of the neighborhood crowded into these small rooms, drinking and talking loud and telling stories and sometimes weeping with the neighbors who kept dropping in and passing through with a hug for Pop and a nip of the bottle and the ancient fumbling words for the poor lad's passing.

As Katie came along the creaky upper hallway to the open kitchen door, Runty Nolan was holding the floor with a whiskey story told in an effort to lift Pop's sorrow.

The sight of his daughter entering so quietly was just what Pop needed to break down completely. Now his true feelings flowed at last as he held his Katie close to him. She held him quietly while he sobbed, "Katie girl . . ."

Then softly, still dry-eyed from the shock of it, she asked her little question: "Who did it?"

The question dropped explosively into the middle of the room. Moose, Runty, Pop, young Jimmy Sharkey and three or four other longshoremen passing through looked at one another and hung their heads.

"Who did it?" Katie asked again. "Don't you hear me? Who'd want to harm Joey? Everybody loved him."

Silence can be so intense that it becomes a force in the room as great as sound. Katie felt she had to raise her voice to overcome it. "Are you all deaf? Has that horrible stuff you're drinking eaten through you ear-drums? *Who'd want to harm Joey?*"

Pop put his hand on Katie's arm, gently. He led her into the narrow cubicle behind the kitchen. He was a little drunk—half-gassed, he would have called it.

"Pray for 'im, Katie goil. Ask our Maker t' grant 'im etoinal peace. But don' ask no questions. Please, Katie, fer yer own good. Becuz you won't get no answers. You won't get nuthin' but a snootful o' trouble."

Katie glared at him. "Trouble? Can there be any more trouble? Joey is dead. Joey is dead . . ." It came out as a moan.

Pop put both hands on Katie's arms and tried to reason her back to quietness. "Don' be sayin' that, darlin', don' make it worse. If it's God's will . . ."

"God's will!" She pulled away angrily. "Don't blame it on God. Since when was God an excuse for acting like *pigs*?"

Pop let her go, helplessly.

In the kitchen Uncle Frank was finishing his beer, ready to button his uniform coat and fasten his gun-belt around his comfortable belly. The sight of his uniform suggested something to Katie and she scurried between people to get to him.

"Uncle Frank, you're the one. Why don't you do something? You know Joey. You know he'd never—kill himself like that. He believed in God."

Uncle Frank was a hulking, temperate man who was ready to slack off on his retirement pay in a couple of years. He drew Katie out the kitchen door into the hallway.

"Katie," Uncle Frank began, "you know the facts of life. I think Pop's makin' a mistake to keep you ignorant of them here on this waterfront. It c'n get you into trouble. A different kind o' trouble, but trouble all the same. It's time you knew the score. Katie, down to the station house, we've got a file this thick of waterfront cases—deaths and disappearances and the like—a hundred murders if there's a one. And you know how many arrests? I'm not talkin' about convictions, mind you. Just arrests?"

Katie shook her head.

"Five. And convictions? Two. Just two in all the twenty-eight years I've been on the force."

"But Uncle Frank, in civics we learn . . . In America . . ."

"Katie, walk around the corner, over to River Street, and you're out of America. It's a jungle down there, a no-man's land. A fella falls in the river. They say he's drunk and slipped off the stringpiece. Or a high-low backs into him or a sling slips. There's a dozen different ways. There's more industrial accidents in ship-loading than anything else in the country. One in every five hundred longshoremen's gonna wind up dead be-

fore his time. So these fellers help the accidents along a little bit. It's hard to prove."

"But you're supposed to protect them. Isn't that what you're there for, Uncle Frank?"

"In the books you study, positively. But Katie, there's a lot of things about the way a city runs that never gets into them civics books. Things I'd lose my pension for telling you if it ever got back to my superiors. Donnelly, the Police Commissioner, appointed by the Mayor, used to drive a beer truck for Johnny Friendly. See what I mean?"

"The Police Commissioner . . ."

"Everybody knows that." Uncle Frank nodded sadly. "I could tell you stories. Like what happened to me when I was on the waterfront squad and tried to arrest a loan shark." Uncle Frank gave a short, bitter laugh.

Katie shook her head. "I knew Bohegan was full of politics. I've heard Pop say that much. But the Sisters say we live in a Christian world."

Uncle Frank tightened his gun-belt around his waist. "It's a world with Christians, you c'n go that far. It's pretty tough sleddin' for 'em here in Bohegan, Katie. I didn't tell you this to steam you up. It was to make you see how hopeless it is, so you'll take this as you've got to take it. In pain and resignation, Katie."

He pulled his belt a notch tighter, taking a deep breath, a deep inhaling sigh. "Remember what I told you now, Katie. This is just between us, so you'll know to do what your old man says and not push into it any further. If you mention I told you, whfff" (he made a whistling sound) "goes my pension."

Then he trudged on down the stairs.

On the second landing Katie could hear Uncle Frank say, "Evenin', Father," with the note of boyish respect that Irish males always put on when addressing a priest. A moment later Father Barry came into view as he mounted the stairs at his usual rapid pace.

"Well, Katie," he said when he saw the girl standing alone in the rear of the hallway, "I'd hardly recognize you since the summer. You've grown up."

"Yes, Father," she said, in no mood for small talk.

"It's rough about Joey," Father Barry said. "He was the best. We're all gonna miss him. But . . ."

He groped for something consoling, some assuaging promise of the hereafter, but he was a product of the Bohegan banks, raised tough and poor and he couldn't help being a realist. No use filling them with a lot of high-sounding pap, he had often told the pastor, Father Donoghue, whom he assisted at St. Timothy's. These were plain-talking people. They deserved plain answers.

"Pop is inside," the girl said. "He'll be glad to see you."

"How's he takin' it?" Father Barry asked.

Katie shrugged. "He's all right. He's taking it."

"I'll be sayin' the Rosary in a couple of minutes," Father Barry said as he went in.

"I'll be there, Father," Katie said. But she lingered in the hall, with tears stinging the corners of her eyes. She waited until she was sure she had herself under control before walking back through the kitchen to the front bedroom. There Pop and his friends and the well-wishing neighbors were grouped around Father Barry.

Katie responded in muffled, chanting tones with the others. In real pain, with her heart crying tears for *Joey Joey*, she chanted the Our Fathers and Hail Marys and those mysteriously soothing words *as it was in the beginning is now and ever shall be world without end Amen* . . .

When it was over Mrs. Gallagher brought the Father a ham sandwich and Runty said, "Here, Father, here's something to wash it down with," and stuck a can of beer into his face. Father Barry took it gladly. He unbuttoned his collar at the back and sat down to relax a little, a roughneck at heart but a shrewd, strong-minded, dedicated one.

The saying of the Rosary and the physical presence of a priest

had eased Pop's mind. Father Barry felt he had accomplished what he could. They would meet again in Paradise, he had assured them. What more could he say?

Father Barry allowed himself a second and final beer. Then he set the time for Joey's Requiem Mass, gave Pop his blessing, slapped him forcefully on the shoulder and hurried toward the door. Mrs. Glennon, around the corner, was on her way out with cancer.

As Father Barry took his leave with a snappy "So long," and "See ya, now," and "Be good, Jimmy," and a last buck-up-God-bless for Pop, Katie followed him out into the hallway.

"Father . . ."

Father Barry wheeled as he was starting quickly down the stairs. He wasn't prepared for this unexpected delay. "Yes, Katie?"

"Father, Joey was *pushed*, you know that, don't you?" She was trembling, with a helpless, dry-sobbing anger.

He put his hand out to soothe her. "Take it easy, Katie. I know it's rough. I can't give you the easy answers. But time and faith . . . time and faith are great healers."

"Time and faith!" Katie flung his own words back at him so hard that they had the impact of a sudden blow. "Time and faith. My brother's dead, pushed off this roof by beasts who hate the face of God. And you stand here talking drivel about time and faith."

"It may not be enough, Katie, but I do what I can."

Her eyes blazed. "Are you sure, Father? Only God has the power to give and take a life. Isn't that true, Father?"

"Of course, Katie, you know that."

"So if—if those filthy animals take Joey's life, and the police—Uncle Frank told me—just turn their backs and forget about it, isn't it up to you to do something about it? To try and do something about it? If somebody takes a life, if there's all this evil on the waterfront, how can you pretend you've got a Christian parish—and, and all those fine things we're supposed to be learning?"

Father Barry took a step backwards down the stairs. "Katie, the Glennons are waiting for me. I'll be glad to discuss this with you any time. As I was saying, I want to do what I can. I'll be in the church whenever you need me."

Katie glared at him and then laughed angrily. The blow of Joey's death and the sickening resignation of her father and the painful flash of insight into Bohegan justice her uncle had just given her had all combined to depress her to the point where she no longer knew what she was saying.

"In the church when you need me," she repeated, in a way that made Father Barry wince. "Was there ever a saint who hid in the church?"

The question spun the priest around as if he'd been struck by one of Specs Flavin's .38 slugs. He went rapidly down the stairs and did not look back.

"O Mother, Mother of God, help me," Katie said aloud.

Seven

MRS. GLENNON was dying in front of Father Barry's eyes, a little each day, and her five kids were hungry and poorly dressed. Beanie Glennon had been down in the corner bar when Father Pete—as the Glennons called him—arrived, and the oldest boy had been sent down as usual to fetch the old man. The priest dreaded what would happen to the kids when Mrs. Glennon checked out. And he wondered why it should have to be so hard for Mrs. Glennon, suffering illness and poverty and, worst of all, uncertainty for the five kids. He had tried to comfort her, assure her, and his words had helped a little. But again, as with Katie Doyle, were these only words? Was there more he could be doing? Sure it was a hard day, a long day, from five A.M., when he began with his own prayers and his preparations for six-o'clock Mass to this last family call

at eleven. But doubt nagged him in his end-of-day weariness. Was there more he could be doing? Weren't these more than a continuous series of needy individual cases? Wasn't there a pattern here of insecurity, lawlessness, of Cain-and-Abel destruction?

He could have reached the rectory by walking the several blocks along Market Street, but he felt himself drawn down to River Street. The events of the day cut into his mind with sharp edges. *Was there ever a saint who hid in the church?* The simple question nagged him and ragged him.

A filthy, slightly bent-over, one-armed river rat staggered backward out of a bar as if he had been pushed. When he saw the priest his hand extended automatically. "A dime. One thin dime for a cuppa cawfee."

Father Barry reached in his pocket for a coin, part of his carefully hoarded cigarette fund. Here was his brother with no right arm and no money and probably no place to flop, one of a thousand drifters in the harbor. Here was the least of mine, pushed from bar to bar, from gutter to gutter. Father Barry remembered seeing him at Mass occasionally. Mutt Murphy, that was his name, a little off his rocker from drink and the kicking around he had taken.

"Here," Father Barry said. "Go have a beer on me."

"God bless ya, Father. God bless ya," Mutt mumbled through his swollen lips. Then he looked into the face of the priest. "Oh, Father, you was the one give Joey Doyle his last rites."

When Father Barry nodded, Mutt brought his face so close to the priest's that the sour breath offended him. But Father Barry did not pull his head back.

"That Joey Doyle was a saint, Father, ya know that? Went right in the union office t' try 'n get me me compensation. Them bums threw him out. They woik hand in hand with the shippers. Ya know that, Father? They aint inter-rested in *this*"—he slapped his stump roughly—"even if I got it on board ship. All them bums is inter-rested in is *this* . . ." He put out his good

arm and rubbed his fingers together to make the ancient sign of greed for money. "Jesus Mary 'n Joseph, if we had a honest t' God union down here instead of a bunch of safecrackers, I'd be drawin' a hundred bucks a month easy. I aint no bum, no beggar in me heart, Father, that's the God's truth. But I can't get no job and I never stood in good enough with Johnny Friendly. What's a fella gonna do, Father?"

"This kid Doyle," Father Barry asked, "you're sure he was pushed?"

Mutt Murphy took an unsteady backward step. "Are you kiddin', Father? What you lookin' t' do, dump me in the river?"

Father Barry walked on. He walked out to the end of a railroad pier and stared at the broken pattern of little square lights twinkling in the massive buildings across the river. There was the mightiest city in the world half sleeping, half reveling. Millions and millions and millions of people and not one of them aware of Mutt Murphy and his lost arm. Or of Joey Doyle and his lost life.

Father Barry had come from the poor and had gone into the priesthood to serve the poor. But the years had made him prudent. Hiding in the church, Katie had said. Father Barry had only walked a few miles but he had come a long way from Katie Doyle's angry question. Man, St. Bernard had insisted, was a noble creature with a majestic destiny. Was it Joey Doyle's majestic destiny to go hurtling down through the tenement clotheslines, tossed into the filthy courtyard like an empty beer can?

So that Katie's blunt question "What are you going to do about it?" linked the priest to God on one side and man on the other. You could call it politics or a police problem and hide from it in the church, but you were in it, brother, you were in it. Joey's death and the search for the meaning of it, the motive of it, the cure of it, would lead his parish church back into the streets of Bohegan where the people were Christian for one hour on Sunday and enemies one of another all week long.

Father Barry felt exhilarated. More than the breeze rising from the river was bracing him now. He didn't know exactly what he was going to do, but at least he was ready to take the first step. *Duc in altum*. Launch out into the deep. Those words always had fascinated him. Be ready to venture out into unknown depths. Was he up to it? Did he have the gospel guts to launch out into the depths?

He turned and started walking rapidly back to the rectory a mile away.

Eight

AWAKENING on the metal frame bed that almost filled the small, stuffy bedroom, Katie felt confused. Her window at school faced east into the morning sunlight, but this morning there was no sun. The single window in the north wall of the narrow room opened on the side of the adjoining building a scant foot away. Heavily, with a sense of discomfort, she remembered where she was and why she was here.

In the front room there was an unmusical counterpoint of masculine snoring, as the loyal members of the wake lay where they had fallen. Runty Nolan was sprawled on the floor with his arms outflung. Jimmy Sharkey lay asleep in the big easy chair with the stuffing working out of it. Moose was boisterous even in sleep; his big body rose and fell with his heavy breathing. Pop's stringy, small-muscled arms hung over the edge of the day-bed. The room was littered with the leavings of the wake.

Katie went into the kitchen, saw the disheartening clutter of plates in the small sink, the left-over sandwiches, the spill of whiskies souring the atmosphere. Again her mind went wishfully back to Marygrove where the Sisters moved immaculately

and the faces of her classmates were scrubbed clean. Dutifully, Katie turned her mind away from Tarrytown to the reality of dirty dishes and a need for coffee to stir Pop and his friends to the efforts of the day.

The sound of coffee perking and Katie rattling the dishes as she stacked them in the sink had begun to penetrate the fuzzy sleep of Patrick Doyle. He stretched and groaned and Runty shifted position on the floor and opened his eyes to a slit.

"A grand wake, Patrick," he muttered with a cheerfulness that was almost automatic. "As handsome a sendoff as I've seen since I buried me own father."

Katie came in with a pot of coffee and some clean cups. "Morning, Pop," she said. "Here's some coffee for you. And for your friends."

She set the coffee down, with the cups and spoons, and went back to the kitchen.

"She's a grand goil," Runty said. "Lucky for you she favors her mother." He gave his ho-ho-ho laugh.

They drank their coffee down in silence. From the river came the hoarse vibration of a boat whistle. Pop could tell the time from the sounds of the river traffic. "Seven o'clock ferry gettin' ready to pull out for Christopher Street," he said. "Time we was gettin' down to the corner."

There was a coffeepot across from the pier, on the opposite corner from Friendly's, an informal information center where—in lieu of some more orderly system—the men picked up their info on the ships coming in. Pop took his worn wool work-coat off a hook with the dirty canvas gloves that were a mark of his trade, along with the stubby cargo hook that was almost a physiological extension of a longshoreman's right arm.

"Put ya hook down," Runty said. "This aint no day for you t' be woikin'. The lads who get woik t'day 'll be chippin' in gladly."

"Sure, Pop, stay home. We'll pass the box for ya," Jimmy Sharkey said.

"Thanks, boys, but I'm gonna shape," Pop said, sticking his hook through his belt over his rear pocket. "Who d'ya think's gonna pay for the funeral? Tom McGovern an' his stinkin' stevedore company? Or Willie Givens, the bum? Nobody's passin' no box for me, thank you just the same. I'm gonna shape."

He led them through the bedroom to the kitchen door.

Katie watched them disappear into the lower stories of the tenement, laughing and talking loud. Had they no feelings? Yes, of course she knew how Pop cried to himself, and Runty was soft as cheese under his bantam swagger. And Moose was rough and loud, but she knew inside he was almost too gentle for the bruising give-and-take of the life on the docks. But there had been too many "accidents" like Joey's on the waterfront. Too many ribs caved in. Too many faces hacked with steel pikes and gun handles. Until finally even the best of them, like Pop, were as accustomed to homicide and assault as they were to the sound of foghorns and ship whistles.

For Father Barry it had been a night of pacing and reading, of meditation and prayer. He had thumbed the works of the Church scholars from the dark-skinned Augustine through Aquinas to the social thinking of Pius XI and Maritain. He had thought hard about the martyrs, Paul, the first Ignatius, Stephen, St. John of the Cross and Thomas More, fierce, unbending men. And the saints of mercy and service, Francis Xavier, an old favorite, and the other self-denying Francis, barefoot from Assisi, walking the hard road.

He had heard the chimes in the town hall strike three and as the final tone burrowed back into the silence of the night he had thrown himself into bed in his shorts because he had a six-o'clock Mass to say. But in the darkness he heard again the Doyle girl's clean, angry, slightly childish voice: *Was there ever a saint who hid in the church?*

His alarm, set for five-thirty, allowed just enough time for a

wash, a quick shave and a morning prayer before the six-o'clock Mass. In the sacristy when he tied the cincture around his waist Father Barry thought of its meaning in a way that had not occurred to him since he was first ordained; he was actually girding his loins for battle. And at the low Mass at six, which he had to admit to himself he often had run through mechanically and even sleepily, he felt to an almost unbearable degree the passion of the sacrifice.

As soon as he had finished saying Mass, unvested and made his thanksgiving, he hurried back to his room, changed into his street clothes and paced off the nearly three blocks to the Doyle flat.

At his knock, Katie came to the door with a dustpan. "Mornin', Katie," Father Barry said.

She hesitated whether to ask him in. She was still in the middle of her straightening. "Oh, Father—if I had known you were coming I would've lit the hall light."

"That's okay, Katie. Last night you lit a big light"—his hand tapped his temple nervously—"up here."

"I'm afraid I spoke out of turn," Katie said with conventional courtesy.

Father Barry hadn't come all this way for schoolgirl amenities. "Listen, kid, you said what you meant. You belted me good. It kept me up all night, taking a long, hard look at what I've been doin'. What I began to see didn't look so hot. You think I ought to live my religion, not just preach it. Am I right?"

Katie blushed. She was sorry for the young priest with his red eyes and his angry, pleading look.

"Okay. You don't have to talk. Last night you did the talking. Now it's my turn. This is my parish. I'm going down to the docks. And I'm going to bone up on this. I'm going to talk to everybody who'll stand still for me. I knew it was there all the time, but you gave me the eyes to see it. I don't know how much I c'n do, but I'll never find out, I'll just be taking the easy out, if I don't go down and take a good look for myself. No

more hiding in the Church for me. Get your coat, Katie. We're going down and take a cut at the ball."

Nine

THE GREAT harbor of the world's most modern metropolis still hired its dockmen in the same haphazard way as in the days of the sailing ships. London and Liverpool and San Francisco had long since put away as a museum relic the hiring whistle, but here in Bohegan and all around the harbor the century-old whistle still called the willing hands, called them not to work, but to offer themselves for work while the hiring boss looked them over and made his choices. In the clipper days he combed through them to separate the able workers from the rummies. Now he looked them over for signs of compliance. There were subtle devices an outsider scarcely would notice, a match over the left ear signaling willingness to kick back a couple of dollars on the job or a tiny American flag pinned to a windbreaker lapel identifying the wearer as a member in good standing of the kick-back club.

This morning Captain Schlegel, popularly called "Schnorkel," an ex-German submariner who bossed the pier for Interstate, had just given Big Mac the cargo breakdown on the *Maria Cristal*, a banana boat from Panama: two loft gangs, six regular gangs and two hundred extra banana carriers. A discipline-minded Prussian recruited by Tom McGovern, it had been Captain Schlegel who had said arrogantly to the press, "I have no special love for gangsters, but I can tell you one thing, you need a strong arm around here to keep in line the kind of working force we've got to deal with on the docks." Captain Schlegel, on orders from Interstate, slipped a Christmas envelope to Johnny Friendly every Christmas, as well as to Charley the Gent

and their subordinates, because Interstate was grateful for their co-operation. Oh, sure they shook you down once in a while, but it was quicker and cheaper to pay ten thousand on the line than to deal with the complicated demands of a genuine union.

A few minutes before, Captain Schlegel had been surprised when an Irish priest from across the park at St. Timothy's had come in with Joey Doyle's sister and asked if they could see a shape-up. Privately Captain Schlegel had considered Joey a trouble-maker, an agitator, the sort of smart-aleck who quoted back to you the union-stevedore agreement. But he hastened to assure the priest and the girl that her brother had been well liked by the company, a good worker, a fine boy. In behalf of Interstate Captain Schlegel extended his sympathies. Although the accident was off-hours, away from the pier and the company was in no way involved, Captain Schlegel was going to recommend that Interstate send Mr. Doyle a check for \$100 as an official expression of company condolence. As to the shape-up that they wished to see, he frankly wondered why they should want to bother themselves watching a routine hiring practice. But if they wished to take the time, he would be happy to have a guard escort them to the entrance to Pier B where the morning hiring was about to take place. However, it would be better, he suggested, if they did not stop to ask Mr. McGown, the hiring boss, any questions, as he would be extremely busy with his morning duties.

Captain Schlegel didn't like this Father snooping around. He'd have to check into this. And the Doyle girl coming down was not a good sign either. But Captain Schlegel knew how to be correct with a Roman collar and a young lady. He bowed and brought his heels together in a habit-hardened courtesy, and assured them of his eagerness to show them any phase of the stevedore operation they wished to see.

So Father Barry and Katie were looking on when Big Mac came out to the pier entrance with the cigar box full of brass tabs, covering the number of jobs to be filled.

McGown's cheeks puffed out as he blew on his whistle. Some

four hundred men fell into a dutiful, silent horseshoe around him. They shaped according to custom. First Big Mac called out the men for the loft, mostly old men no longer fit for the heavy work, but scattered among them a few youthful privileged characters to whom Johnny Friendly owed some favor. "Hogan—Smith—Krajowski—Malloy—" Big Mac shouted. Terry caught his tab with a Willie Mays flourish and winked at his buddy, Jackie Roche.

Then Big Mac began filling the regular gangs, looking for familiar faces and the kickback matches, and saying, "You—yeah you—okay you . . ." When he got down to the banana carriers the desperation mounted. Men jostled his arm in their eagerness, their frost-bitten faces challenging him, expressing an odd mixture of obsequiousness and defiance.

"C'mon, Mac, I need a day bad . . ."

"I got five kids home, Mac, I gotta work t'day . . ."

"Hey, Mac, remember me, you said next time you'd . . ."

Exactly how it started a moment later was never clear. It was "one of those things," a question mark to be raked over and argued in the bars for years to come. Big Mac was being crowded, jostled, heckled. Whether, tipsy and contemptuous, he deliberately tossed the cherished tabs into the air, or whether some over-anxious docker grabbed for a tab and upset the box, the fact remained that nearly two hundred tabs flew into the air. They scattered in front of the pier entrance and as they fell nearly four hundred men howled and scrambled and hustled and fought for them.

There were human snarls as vicious as any animal's and the sound of crunching bones and work-hardened fists making bloody wounds. It had begun so suddenly and was so unreal, even as it raged in front of them, that Father Barry and Katie experienced it as if it were a nightmare. They saw Moose make a flying lunge at a tab, only to have a heavy boot stomp his hand to a bloody mess. In the melee they caught sight of Runty, bobbing up like a battered dinghy in a stormy sea, blood was dripping from one eye. Pop, Pop, where was Pop! She couldn't

bear the thought of her father overwhelmed and dragged down into that churning, bloodied tangle of bodies. "Pop, Pop!" she cried out. Then she saw him, battling near the circumference of the free-for-all. He spied a tab on the ground near him, reached out to it, grabbed for it, was shoved aside, pistoned his fists into the nearest face and finally was ready to pick up the prize when the voice of the figure he had just knocked out of the way shouted:

"Hey, Terry, grab it fer me."

Terry Malloy, standing just beyond the timekeeper, enjoying the fun, executed a quick-reflex reach for the tab and scooped it up. "Here ya go, Jackie boy," he sang out, easily body-checking the old man.

Before Father Barry could stop her, Katie was rushing forward. "Give me that, give me that," she screamed, grabbing at the tab in Terry's upraised hand. Terry swung around, away from her hand, circling to her left as a boxer avoids a right-hand puncher. Light on his feet, amused, playing with her, he kept saying, "Huh? Huh? What you want? Huh?"

"It belongs to Pop. He saw it first." Katie was trying not to cry. Terry was grinning at her and she slapped at his face, but he pulled away, still grinning at her.

"Pop? I thought maybe you was gonna work—with all them muscles. Pop, huh? What makes him so special?"

As Katie made another grab at the tab that Terry managed to keep just out of her reach, it was Jackie Roche who said, "Don't ya recognize him, dopey? That's old man Doyle."

Hey Joey, Joey Doyle—he's one of yours—I recognized the band.

Terry stopped circling away from her. He could feel something vague and bewildering, something falling away from him, like his stomach on the roller-coaster at Coney.

"Doyle . . . Joey Doyle's . . . you're his . . ."

"Sister," Katie said, in a flat, direct tone, "Yes, I am."

Terry looked at her and shook his head as if he was clearing it after a bad round. Then he made himself tough again. He turned

to Jackie. "Who the hell wants to lug bananas in the rain anyhow? Am I right, Jackie boy?"

"Aah, give it to 'im," Jackie said.

"Here ya go, muscles," Terry said to Katie and slapped the tab into her hand. "It was nice wrastlin' with ya."

He raised his left hand, boxer style, flicked a couple of quick jabs into the air and winked at her.

"C'mon, Jackie, let's go over to Friendly's and catch a few beers. I c'n check in any time."

He and Jackie started across the street to the bar. Katie watched him go, with his hands in his pockets, his shoulders slightly hunched, wise-cracking to his chum out of the corner of his mouth.

"Who is that fresh kid?" she asked Moose, who had come up out of the battle royal to see if she was all right.

"That was Terry Malloy, the kid brother of Charley the Gent," Moose explained. "Just a punk."

"Charley the Gent?"

"He's our local representative on the District Council. A politician." Moose didn't want to tell her any more.

Father Barry came rapidly toward them, half leading Pop, who was wiping the blood off his face with a handkerchief the priest had given him. Pop pulled himself free. He was in a sweaty rage, not so much at losing the tab. Nearly forty years on the waterfront had hardened him to the everyday setbacks. No, the rage was for Katie's being down here where he had always forbidden her.

Katie held the tab out to him, ashamed at having to see his shame. "Here—I got it for you."

Pop grabbed it from her. "Okay—I c'n use it." He would have slapped her if it hadn't been for the presence of the priest. "Now just as soon as we bury 'im you're goin' back to the Sisters where you belong." He turned on the priest. "I'm surprised at you, Father, if ya don' mind me sayin' so. Lettin' her see things that aint fit fer the eyes of a decent goil. And if I wuz you I'd stay outa this too, Father."

"She wanted to have a good look at it. Maybe it's time we all took a good look at it," Father Barry said.

A bull voice broke in. It was Big Mac, drunkenly rebuilding the blocks of his dignity. "Hey, Doyle, you got a tab?"

Pop held it up defiantly. "Yeah."

"Then knock off the chin music. Git in there. Number two hatch starboard gang. Puh-ronto."

To one side of the pier entrance, along the ledge bordering the slip where the fruit boat rode at mooring, Luke, Runty, Moose and Jimmy stood in a disconsolate circle with a couple of other veteran dockers. It was a custom, this aimless waiting after the chosen gangs had already started breaking into the cargo.

Father Barry, always intense and now wound dangerously tight as a result of what he had seen, strode up to the group.

"Well, what d'ya do now?"

The men didn't look at him. A sense of guilt pressed upon them, as if they had to atone for their helplessness. And the presence of Katie shriveled them too. They were, most of them, Irishmen, never completely at ease with women under the best of circumstances.

Father Barry held his ground. He knew they didn't want him down here any more than they wanted the girl. "I said what d'ya do now?"

Moose shrugged. "Like the man sayed. Come back tomorra."

"And if he won't pick you the next day?" Father Barry asked.

Moose hunched his shoulders. "Ya hit 'J.P.' Morgan fer a loan. A longshoreman spends the money t'day he hopes t'make t'morra. That's a fact, Father."

"Not so loud," Jimmy Sharkey warned, aware of Truck and Gilly looking on from the pier entrance.

"Moose, you try t' whisper somethin' and I swear t' Christ they c'n hear it clear t' the end of the next block." Runty half laughed. "C'mon, let's go get a ball."

But Father Barry held them with his anger. "Is that all you

do, just take it like this? I thought you boys had a union. There isn't a labor union in the country that'd stand for a deal like this."

Runty looked around to see if Truck and Gilly were still on the prowl. "If I wuz you, Father," he said, "I wouldn't push my nose in this thing. I don' mean no disrespect. Fer yer own good I mean it. But if you want t' know, we don' have no union. We got these bums on top of us stickin' our dues 'n kickbacks in their pockets an' drivin' around in four-thousand-buck con-voitables."

"You mean you fellers can't get up in a meeting and . . ."

Again they looked at each other with humorous shrugs.

Jimmy Sharkey said, "You know what they call Four-Four-Seven? The pistol local."

"I do remember hearing that," Father Barry said.

"It's one thing to hear it. It's another thing to feel it with the pistol butts on yer noggin," Runty said.

"Tha's no lie, Father," Jimmy said. "You get up in a meetin' and ask a question, you're lookin' t' get your brains knocked out. Right now we couldn't even be talkin' like this if we didn't have you along for pertection. Those cowboys 'd be ridin' herd on us."

Moose nodded. "Name one place where it's safe even t' talk without gettin' clobbered," he yelled. "Name me one. Just one."

"The church," Father Barry said quickly.

"The church!" Moose shouted in amazement.

"Shhh, keep it down to a shout," Jimmy cautioned. "You mean that, Father?"

"I said the church. Use the basement of the church."

This time Runty didn't laugh. "Do you know what you're lettin' yerself in for, Father?"

"No—I don't," Father Barry admitted. "But I'm ready to find out."

The Waterfront Western Union has no central office, no teletype machines, no uniformed messenger boys. Without them, news seems to flash around the harbor, from pier to pier, from bar to bar, from tenement to tenement. In less than an hour the

Bohegan docks buzzed with news that Father Barry was calling a protest meeting to look into the job done on Joey Doyle.

Ten

WORD OF THE meeting whipped along the waterfront like the wind from the river. Johnny Friendly heard the news from Charley Malloy who told it to him tentatively, as if in fear of the dark age practice of destroying bearers of ill tidings.

You don't get to be a leader by being frightened, and Johnny Friendly wasn't going to be bugged by any parish priest and a handful of crybabies. Just the same, he told Charley, have somebody case the meeting. Get the names. Maybe frighten 'em a little as they come out. But leave the church alone. "I don't want to get in bad with my mother."

It had been left to Charley to decide how to once-over the church meeting. On the way down to the docks he settled for Terry. It would do the kid good, he figured. Rein him in a little closer to the organization. Put some cabbage in his pocket.

Actually, Terry was a good choice. Despite the blood relationship, he was known to be outside the mob. And so independent-peculiar that no one would be too surprised what he did. There were even those who thought he was just a touch punchy. It was imperceptible, but maybe it was there at that. A fellow like that could wander into a church and pretend he didn't know exactly what he was doing. And furthermore, Charley felt he could trust Terry. Even if the kid believed in nothing, not even money, and expressed enthusiasm for nothing except his pigeons, he had a son-father respect that amounted to awe for Charley. When their old man had staggered out on them and the Children's Aid had taken them to some strange barrack-like shelter there had been only Charley to say, "Don't worry, kid. We'll handle it."

When he strode into the overflow chapel in the church basement and found only a scattered handful of longshoremen on hand for the meeting, Father Barry felt a twinge of disappointment. There weren't more than a dozen, and with many sitting alone and leaving seats gaping between them as if not wanting the others to know they were there, the group looked even smaller.

Father Barry had scraped and scrambled all day not only to prepare himself for this meeting, but to inveigle permission to hold it at all. At first the Pastor, Father Donoghue, had been annoyed with his curate for leaping in with an invitation to longshoremen without first consulting him.

But it was an emergency, Father Barry had insisted, the sort of thing a waterfront church should be ready to jump into with both feet. Father Donoghue hadn't been so sure. President Willie Givens was known to be a good friend of Monsignor O'Hare. Might this meeting not offend Givens, and therefore the Monsignor? And if the Monsignor went to the Bishop? The Pastor stood in pretty well with the Bishop, Father Barry reminded him. Yes, Father Donoghue said, and I'd like to remain so. We have a serious concern with these men's souls as individuals, he pointed out. But is it our function to call them together as a social body? Aren't we overstepping our boundaries?

Father Donoghue asked his questions mildly enough. He was a pious, kindly man, sympathetic to the poor who made up so much of his parish, although not unmindful of the practicalities.

In answer, Father Barry quoted a statement of Pope Pius about the error of thinking the authority of the church is limited to religious matters. "Social problems are of concern to the conscience and salvation of man," Father Barry had roughly translated the Holy Father. "It looks to me as if one of our parishioners was murdered for trying to establish a more human and moral social order on the docks. Does his own parish church say 'it's none of our business'? Isn't that exactly what the Pope is talking about, brought right down here to the docks of Bohegan?"

Father Donoghue said he would take the matter under consideration and let his eager, hot-tempered curate know by mid-afternoon. At three-thirty, with a daring that surprised even himself, he gave Father Barry a green light.

Once the meeting was set, Father Barry called Frank Doyle, the old cop, to drop in for a little chat. Doyle was on the fence the first half hour. He wanted that pension and he was afraid he had already unburdened himself too freely to Katie. After he got talking he found it a relief.

Frank Doyle talked to Father Barry for over an hour. The priest took notes but filed it as the story Mike X. Doyle told him of some earlier Bohegan murders, and of police blackout of clues and evidence. He agreed that pressing the case of his nephew was an ideal opening wedge for a better deal on the docks. But he had seen too much to believe that the priest, for all his good intentions, could get anywhere. The line-up against him, from the mob, through the stevedore companies, to City Hall had headed off tougher competition.

By the end of the day, after Father Barry had been gathering facts from as many sources as possible, he was increasingly interested in the forthcoming investigation. A rank-and-file trade-union revolt seemed impossible until public opinion was aroused and the evils spotlighted in the press in a way that would make it difficult for Johnny Friendly and his respectable supporters to continue running the show with medieval contempt for opposition.

Entering the basement chapel, Father Barry felt as keyed up as a boxer going down the aisle to his first main event. Father Vincent, a portly man of thirty-five, followed him in. Harry Vincent admired Father Barry, but he thought he was inviting ruin to a promising career.

When Father Barry faced these men in their windbreakers and coarse wool shirts, he began in his rapid-fire, slightly nasal, East Bohegan way: "Well, uh, I thought there'd be more of you here, but we, uh, the Romans found out what a handful could do—if it's the right handful."

He paused for some response, for some sign that he was on the target, but the men just looked up at him and waited. Go on, Father, play your hand, the poker faces seemed to be saying. Father Barry looked across them to Katie, in one of the rear pews. Even she seemed to be waiting.

So he plunged: "Uh, I'm just a potato eater, but isn't it simple as one-two-three? One—the working conditions are bad. You got 40,000 men competing for less than 20,000 jobs. You've got a union that works against you instead of for you. Two—conditions are bad because the union is run by a mob—am I right?—and the mob does the hiring. Two-thirds of your hiring bosses have got criminal records. And three—the only way you can break the mob is to stop letting them get away with murder. When they knock off one of you they keep the rest of you in line. Now listen, boys, if one of you will just answer one question we'd have a start. And, uh, that question is: Who killed Joey Doyle?"

He tried to catch the eyes of his listeners, but not one of them would be trapped. The silence became oppressive. The wooden pews creaked as men shifted weight self-consciously.

"I've got a hunch every one of you could tell us something about it," Father Barry said. "How can we call ourselves Christians and protect these murderers with our silence? Can't you see?" Father Barry was shouting now. "On this waterfront, in a supposedly Catholic neighborhood, murder has become a commonplace. There's something lousy rotten on this waterfront. And the entire parish—all of you—are conspiring in it."

His loud, harsh voice trailed away. In the silence the creaking of a door in the rear of the room was very loud. It was Terry Malloy, entering with an exaggerated rolling of his shoulders. He slumped down into the back pew.

Runty Nolan glared across the empty rows at Terry and then muttered audibly to Moose, "Who invited him t' this party?"

Terry leaned back, looking smug. He felt out of place.

"Anybody in the harbor is welcome here," Father Barry

said, rebuking Runty. Then he spoke directly to Terry. "I'm trying to find out just what happened to Joey Doyle. Maybe you can help."

Terry kept his hands behind his neck and shook his head slightly, still wearing the mask of scorn and boredom.

"The brother of Charley the Gent," Runty stage-whispered to Moose. "They'll help us get to the bottom of the river."

Terry had been instructed not to open his mouth. But he had a strong feeling about anyone's mentioning his brother. It was a mixture of pride and shame. So now he could not resist saying, "You better keep Charley outa this."

Katie, half-turned in her seat, had been watching the late-comer curiously. She recognized him as the boy who had given her the work-tab after roughly blocking Pop out to grab it away from him. And now, studying his face, she remembered him from earlier days, at parochial school on Pulaski Street before she went away to Marygrove.

"Now *listen!*" Father Barry snapped them back to attention. "Don't kid me. I've been talkin' to people about this thing all day. You know who the pistols are. Are you goin' to keep still until they cut you down one by one. Are you?" Because Nolan had spoken up, and had a reputation for guts, Father Barry took a step toward him. "Hey, Nolan, how about you?"

"One thing you've got to understand, Father," Runty said. "On the docks we've always been D 'n D."

"D 'n D?" Father Barry hadn't heard that one.

Runty nodded. "Deef 'n dumb. No matter how much we hate the torpedoes, we don't rat."

All the men nodded their heads or muttered an almost inaudible "Tha's right, Father."

Here was the nub of it, here was the code. Father Barry felt like a man trying to tear down a cemented stone barricade with his bare hands.

"Boys get smart," he shouted. "I know you're getting pushed around, but there's one thing we've got in this country and that's ways of fighting back. If you'll use 'em. Like this in-

vestigation they're trying to get going. Sure you don't like the State butting in, I know all about that. But think of it this way, the State—which is after all only you and you and everybody else—is giving you a chance to get something out into the open that's been festering in the dark for years and years. You stand up and testify for what you know is right and decent and democratic and Christian against what you know is wrong and evil and stinks like dead fish floating at the edge of the river. You do that and you start to make a new climate, a new soil where honest-to-God trade-unionism can start to take root for a change. Boys, break the Joey Doyle case and you begin to break the power of the mob. Break the power of the mob and you begin to see a little daylight on the kind of job security set-up you deserve down here. You say ratting. What's ratting to them is telling the truth for you. Now can't you see that?"

Again the same crestfallen, self-ashamed silence hung over the room. Father Barry lowered his hands, defeated. He started to raise his hands and then dropped them again in a gesture of despair. He looked over the heads of the silent men to Katie, as if to ask: Where do we go from here?

There was a prolonged, awkward pause. Father Vincent seized this moment to take over the meeting. Smiling at Father Barry, and with a benign voice, he said, "This seems to be just about all we can do at this time. I think you will agree with that, Father. And so may we close with a few words from St. Matthew, 'Come unto me, all ye who are heavily burdened and I . . .'"

Father Vincent's benediction was never completed. At this moment he was drowned out by an explosive wooden thunder outside on the sidewalk above the basement window level.

"Baseball bats," Runty said. "That must be our friends."

Everybody was on his feet. Joey Doyle was forgotten now.

"There's a back way out through the inner courtyard," Father Barry shouted. "You better go home in pairs."

Outside the pounding of baseball bats on the sidewalk rose to a frightful crescendo—boom-boom-boom-boom-boom-boom.

Inside people were shouting against the din. "This way, Tim. Hey! C'mon, hurry . . ."

Father Barry was trying to restore order, but the group was out of his control now. Truck Amon and his goons had taken the play away from him.

"What did I tell you—sticking your neck out?" Father Vincent shouted at Father Barry. "This is a police problem. Let them try to handle it."

"These fellers need help, Harry," Father Barry insisted. "I'm gonna go out and get those baseball bats."

But when he stepped outside, the Friendly muscle seemed to have vanished into the shadowy dampness of the night. He peered into the darkness, puzzled and disconcerted. Down the street from the park the blur of red neon lights beckoned men to drink, and to forget, to drink and to dummy up.

Eleven

WHEN FATHER BARRY returned, the basement chapel was empty. During the moment he had stepped outside, there had been a brief, charged, almost wordless meeting between Katie and Terry Malloy that had brought them together and hurried them out into the night before she could focus her mind on what was happening. Watching her, Terry had been quick to notice how she stood uncertainly at the side door, too frightened at the pounding of the bats to be able to follow Moose and Jimmy out when they had called her. In that instant of hesitation, Terry had grabbed her arm. "Not that way. C'mon, I'll get ya out." Obeying the rough grasp of his hand on her arm she had almost automatically started running along with him, out the back door and up the stairway to the main level, then through an emergency exit and down a fire escape that led into an alley.

They hurried across the street into Pulaski Park. A clammy mist floated over the empty benches. In the darkness the riding lights of the ships on the river were indistinct yellow sparklers.

It was not until they entered the park that Katie became conscious of his tight grip on her arm and pulled away.

"Thanks," she said. "I'll be able to get home all right now."

She started along the path that led through the middle of the park, walking at a rapid pace. But he loped alongside, drawn along with her.

"You don' hafta be scared of me," he told her. "I'm not gonna bite ya. Wha's the matter? They don't let you walk with fellas where you've been?"

She tossed her head slightly. "You know how the Sisters are," she said.

She had lovely skin, smooth and fresh, like a—his clumsy mind groped—like a pink rose. He had noticed how her skin glowed in the light of the church basement.

"You training to be a nun or something?" he asked suddenly.

"No," she said seriously, "it's a regular college. It's just run by the nuns. The Sisters of St. Anne."

"Yeah? Where is that? Where you stay?"

"In Tarrytown."

"Tarrytown?" He wrinkled his nose. "I'll bet that's a real corny joint. I don't go for the country. I was in a training camp once. The crickets made me nervous. What a racket!"

She laughed, for the first time. She was prettier than he had thought. "You know you've got a real sweet laugh," he said, "real sweet. You come down here often?"

"Vacations," she said. "I haven't been here since Easter. I was away for the summer as a counselor."

"That's nice," he said. "And you spend all your time up there just learnin' stuff, huh?"

She nodded with a small smile. "There's a lot of stuff to learn. I want to be a teacher."

"A teacher!" he said. "Wow. You know personally I admire brains. My brother Charley is a very brainy guy. He had a

couple of years of college. He can talk as good as any lawyer. Very brainy."

"It isn't just brains," Katie said. "It's, well—how you use them."

Terry looked at her and nodded, impressed. Charley was brainy, all right, but he never talked like this. He knew Charley would chew him out, but he could not stop following her.

"You know, I've seen you lots of times before," he said. "Remember parochial school here on Palooskie Street? Seven, eight years ago. You don't remember me, do ya?"

"Not at first," she said, "but tonight I began to . . . I remember you were in trouble all the time."

Terry was pleased. "Now ya got me. Boy, the way those Sisters used t' whack me. Crack! It's a wonder I wasn't punchy by the time I was twelve." He laughed. "They thought they was gonna beat an education into me, but I foxed 'em!"

Katie looked at him. "Maybe they just didn't know how to handle you."

Terry was enjoying the turn of conversation. He was feinting her with his question to make her lead, "How would you've done it?"

"With a little more patience and kindness," Katie said. "You know what makes people mean and difficult? When other people don't care enough about them."

While she was talking Terry had raised an imaginary violin to his chin and started to hum a nasal, mocking version of "Hearts and Flowers."

"All right, laugh," she said firmly.

"Patience and kindness," he said. "Now I heard everything."

"And what's so wrong with patience and kindness?" she asked angrily.

"Aah—what—are ya kiddin' me?" Terry said.

"Why should I?" Katie asked. She looked at him so directly that Terry turned his eyes away, disturbed.

"Come on," he said, "I'd better get you home."

They were walking along the high iron railing at the eastern



boundary of the park. They could hear the river washing along the bank beyond them in the darkness. Terry felt good to be walking beside her.

"Ya see, I'm not gonna let ya walk home alone," he explained. "There's too many guys around here with only one thing on their mind."

They were both silent then, and Katie followed him with quiet grace. He stopped abruptly. "Am I going to see ya again?"

Katie looked at him with a guileless, blue-eyed expression unlike anything he had known. "What for?" she asked simply.

Terry paused, shaken by her frankness, by her—the word eluded him—purity. He lifted his shoulders in a characteristic shrug. "I don't know," he admitted. "But are ya?"

In the same gentle, matter-of-fact tone as before, Katie said, "I really don't know."

They walked along silently, full of their own thoughts, listening to the river sounds. At the end of the next block, Katie said, "Thank you. It's only around the corner now. I'll say good night."

"It's been—nice talkin' to ya."

She smiled at him, and an imperceptible shudder went through him. It didn't seem possible that the barest suggestion of a smile could communicate so much, patience and kindness and the far echo of physical love. Or was he only guessing and wishing as she hurried on? With a wry, pained look on his face he watched her melt away from him. Then he punched his right fist into the palm of his left hand so hard that it stung. "God damn," he said to himself out loud. "God damn."

Twelve

WHEN THE meeting in the church basement broke up, Runty sprinted down River Street to the Longdock. In

a few minutes, Moose and Jimmy, having chosen a more circuitous route, joined him. None of the customers around the bar had been to the meeting, but it was a live subject in their minds.

Runty, Moose and Jimmy felt themselves a three-cornered island connected to the others by underwater reefs of experience and even sympathy, but separated by channels of caution and self-preservation. Already it was all over Bohegan that Father Barry's pitch had been to urge the boys to co-operate with the Crime Commission as the only way to blast the corrupted union and clear the way for a new organization.

Truck Amon and Gilly Connors, after beating their pavement chorus outside the church, had watched for Runty to come out and had tailed him to the Longdock. They took up a strategic position at the short side-section of the bar. The musclemen never entered the Longdock unless they were tracking trouble. Runty caught them out of the corner of his eye and went right on making his jokes and laughing his chesty laugh.

The trio from the church meeting had three or four more drinks, kidding with Shorty, the night bartender as if this was just another good-time evening. Then they said their good nights and strolled out. Truck and Gilly finished their drinks, left a fat tip on the bar and followed them out.

Outside, Runty, Moose and Jimmy started down River Street. The footsteps of Truck and Gilly were behind them. The night was cold and Runty blew a little cloud of his own warmer air into it. Suddenly, in his best bravadeero manner, he stopped and waited for the well-named Truck and his rangy side-man to approach.

"Whad d'ya say, fellers?" Truck said, the bristle skin around his eyes crinkling into a slit-eyed smile.

"Hiya, Truck, Gilly," the three muttered.

"Lissen, we'd like t' talk t' ya a minute," Truck said.

"Ye're talkin' to us right now, aintcha?" Runty said.

"Wise-guy," Gilly growled.

Runty was midget-sized alongside Gilly's six-foot-one. Gilly glared at his dwarf antagonist and then appealed to Truck:

"What's with this little bassard? Always has to be such a wise-guy."

"What do you want to give us so much trouble for?" Truck asked earnestly. "No kiddin', you better straighten yourself out, Runty. Next time that priest calls his little prayer-meetin', you stay home, unless you wanna eat cobblestones."

"Definitely," Gilly seconded. He took a vicious swipe at Runty. Runty was hard to hit because he was so short. He timed a short, mean uppercut to Gilly's groin and Gilly reeled back, holding himself.

"You dumb harp, you must like gettin' hit in the head," Truck said, moving in heavily. Runty raised his knee and caught Truck. Truck bellowed like a wounded bull and made a club of his fist and swung it at Runty's head. From somewhere behind them reinforcements arrived. Sonny and Barney came into it in time to clobber Jimmy and Moose. "Run!" Runty yelled when he saw them out-numbered.

They took off down the street and around the corner. Runty lost track of the rest of them as he ran like a prairie dog into the park. In his youth he had been a sprinter for his neighborhood club and at fifty-five he could still run with his knees high. But Gilly was known for his accuracy with a blackjack used as a hurling piece and he was on his target this time again. Runty stumbled and skidded forward. Before he could gain his feet Sonny and Gilly were on him, holding him for the slow-moving Truck who went about his business with methodical brutality.

The park closed in, around and over Runty like an ether cone. Then a sharp, nasal voice was saying, "Here, use this." He looked up and saw a white handkerchief. "Where the hell did you come from?" The face looking down at him, lean and aroused, said, "I could hear the yelling from my room. I figured this might happen."

"Them dirty bastards," Runty said. "'Scuse me, Father."

"Hell, I agree with you," Father Barry smiled. "Open your mouth."

Runty obliged and the priest looked in at the bloody mess.

"Not too bad," he said. "How's the rest of you? Your ribs?"

Runty tried to laugh. "Could be worse. Considerin' they were usin' 'em for a football."

"And you're still D 'n D?" Father Barry said. "You still call it ratting?"

Runty was sitting up now and he looked at the angry priest for perhaps five seconds without saying anything. Then he said slowly, "Are you on the level, Father?"

"What do you think?" Father Barry tossed it back at him.

Runty shrugged. "Don't get sore, Father. We've seen an awful lot of phonies on the waterfront. Politicians. Mayors. Police commissioners. D.A.'s. Even some priests."

"I know," Father Barry said.

Runty wiped the warm blood away from his mouth. The handkerchief was a bloody wet clot now.

"If I stick my neck out and they chop it off, would that be the end of it?" Runty kept after the priest. "Or are ya willin' to go all the way?"

"Down the line, down the line," Father Barry said.

"I wonder," Runty said. Forty years on the waterfront, he had seen a lot of good men crumble. "They'll put the muscle on ya too, turned-around collar or no turned-around collar."

"Come on across to the house," Father Barry said. "Get yourself cleaned up." As he helped the battered, gnome-like figure to his feet, the priest said, "You stand up and I'll stand up with you."

"Right down to the wire?" Runty asked.

"So help me God," Father Barry said.

Thirteen

TERRY'S FLOCK was aloft again that next afternoon. Terry watched them parentally, occasionally swinging his long pole to keep them exercising.

Billy Conley, attached to Terry like a pilot fish, was enjoying the sight too when he saw Katie Doyle making her way along the roof through the forest of television aerials and clotheslines.

"Who ast that broad up here?" Billy said.

Terry tensed at the sight of the girl approaching across the next roof level. "Okay, I guess they got enough exercise," he said, no longer bothering to follow the flight of the birds. "Let 'em come in."

He handed the pole to Billy and waited for Katie. She had a graceful, lady-like walk, he was thinking; it seemed almost as if she were floating toward him.

"What're you doin' up here on the roof?" Terry asked gruffly.

"Just looking," Katie said.

She was startled. She felt out of place, though she had been up a few times with Joey when he was exercising his flock. She lingered a moment, just now, to look at Joey's coop three roofs away. The birds were still there, unconcernedly eating from the self-feeder. The sight of them, all alive and waiting for Joey, made her brother's absence unbearably intense.

Now that Billy had lowered the pole the birds were circling closer to their loft. Terry hailed them with an encircling wave of his hand. "You're looking at the champion flock of the neighborhood. Everyone of 'em bred 'n raised 'n trained by yours truly."

"I love seeing them fly out over the river. Joey raised pigeons too," Katie said.

Terry frowned. "Yeah. He had a few birds." He glanced at her and then seemed to be studying the tar-paper flooring of the roof. "I went over and fed 'em this morning."

A large blue-checker pigeon with a thick white wattle around the eyes and a proud carriage flew through the movable bars and took his place on the highest perch, where he moved about and cooed authoritatively.

"You see that one," Terry said. "Now what do you think of that hunk a stuff?"

"Oh, she's a beauty," Katie said.

Billy had filled the self-serving watering can and was dexterously tipping it right side up. "She's a *he*," the boy said furiously. "His name is Swifty."

"He's my lead bird," Terry explained. "He's always on that top perch. If another bum tries to come along 'n take that perch he really lets 'im have it."

Katie sighed. "Even pigeons . . ."

"Well, there's one thing about 'em though," Terry said, more in earnest than usual, "they're faithful. Once they're mated they stay together all through their lives until one of 'em dies."

Katie lowered her head. "That's nice," she said.

Terry noticed Billy grinning malevolently at them from inside the coop. "Okay, okay, now get outa there and fix the roof. Make yourself useless," Terry ordered. Billy made an obscene sibilant sound under his breath, but did what he was told. Katie continued to keep her head down.

"You like beer?" Terry asked irrelevantly.

Katie looked at him. "I don't know."

He wanted to touch her, touch her gently. He had never felt tender toward anybody in his life and he was fumbling for words or gestures. "I bet you never had a glass of beer," he said. "That's what I bet. How about you come 'n have one with me?"

"In a saloon?"

"Well, yeah. I mean I know a little dump—a place that's very nice, with a side entrance for ladies and all like that."

"I really shouldn't," Katie said.

"Come on, it won't hurt," Terry begged. "Come on . . . Okay?"

He took her by the hand and drew her along. She told herself a better acquaintanceship with Terry might be a way of cutting into the dark horror of waterfront murder. But it was actually something about the hurt in Terry Malloy, the defensive toughness like the scar tissue over the wounded eyes, that drew her on.

Terry guided Katie to the ladies' bar of the Bellevue, which was the second-best hotel in town. To Terry's chagrin a plump over-made-up young girl was at a corner of the bar with Terry's chum Jackie. Terry tried to look away, but Jackie caught his eye and called over, "Hiya, Terry?"

Terry barely nodded.

"A friend of yours?" Katie said.

Terry winced. "Just a—passin' acquaintance," he reached for the phrase he had heard somewhere. "What're you drinkin'?"

Katie hesitated and in the pause a sailor at the bar said to the bartender. "Hit me with another Gluckenhimer."

"I'll try a—Gluckenhimer," Katie said.

"Two Gluckenheimers," Terry called. "And draw two for chasers."

Katie looked bewildered. "Come on, give a smile. You're begginnin' to live a little," Terry tried to reassure her.

"Hey, Terry," the bartender called over from the bar. "See the fight last night? That new kid Ryff. Both hands. A little bit on your style."

"Ha, ha," Terry said. "I hope he gets better dice than me." To Katie he shrugged the bartender's compliment off. "Comedian."

"Were you really a prizefighter?" Katie asked.

"Aah, I used to be. I was goin' pretty good for a while. But—I didn't stay in shape. I had to take a few dives."

"A dive? You mean into the water?"

Terry laughed. "Yeah. Into the water." He laughed again.

"What are you laughing at?"

He pointed to her. "You. Miss Square from Nowhere."

She blushed slightly but she wasn't put off. "What made you interested—in fighting?"

Terry raised his shoulders again in that gesture of casual disgust. "Aah, I don't know. I had to scrap all my life. I figured I might as well get paid for it. When I was a kid my old man got chopped off"—he saw the question rising in her eyes and added

quickly—"never mind how. Then they stuck Charley 'n me in a dump they called a Children's Home. Boy, that was some home. Well, anyway, I ran away from there and peddled papers, 'n stole a little bit and fought in club smokers and then Charley hooked up with Johnny Friendly and Johnny bought a piece of me . . ."

"A—*piece* of you?"

"That's right," Terry said, without bothering to explain. "He was a piece man. Tied in with Mr. T."

"Who's he?" Katie asked.

"Forget I mentioned him," Terry said quickly. "Well, anyway, I won about twelve straight and then . . ."

He stopped and took a good look at her. What was he, punchy or something? Telling this Doyle broad all this stuff. He never talked about dives, or Mr. T., or the connection with Johnny F. What was he doing—getting soft in the casaba?

"Yes—and then?" Katie said, leaning forward a little and looking into his eyes.

"Aah, what am I runnin' off at the mouth for?" Terry said. "What do you really care?"

"Shouldn't everybody . . ." Katie hesitated.

"Come again?" Terry said.

"I mean, shouldn't everybody care . . . I mean . . . the Mystical Body . . . brotherhood . . . I thought . . ." Katie was groping.

"Gee, thoughts," Terry said, both mocking and impressed. "Alla time, thoughts. And the funny part is, you really believe that drool."

"Yes, I do," she said quietly.

The bartender had set their drinks down on the table. Terry was relieved to have something to do. This kid gave him a funny feeling.

"Well, here we are," he said, picking up the thick jigger with the familiar false bottom, handing it to her and then lifting his own with an air of festivity. "One for the lady and one for the gent. Here's to the first one, I hope it aint the last—Dink—" He

touched glasses with her, lightly ceremonious, and then waited in amusement as she sniffed the rim of the glass suspiciously and allowed the surface of the sharp-smelling liquid to touch her lips.

"Not that way," Terry said. "One hunk. Down the hatch. Like this." In a practiced gesture he poured the shot down his throat.

Challenged, Katie raised the formidable ounce of whiskey to her mouth and gulped it down. Her eyes opened wide and she coughed as it burned all the way down.

"Not bad, huh?" Terry was grinning at her. He felt better when he had her on his own ground. "How about a repeat?"

"No *thanks*."

"Hit me again, Mac," Terry called out, feeling a little more confident with the first ball in him. He drank half the glass of beer and leaned closer to her across the table.

"You wanna hear my philosophy of life?" Terry said, still bothered by her "brotherhood" pitch. "Do it to him before he does it to you."

She looked at him a moment before she said, "I like what our Lord said better."

"Maybe," Terry said. "But I'm not lookin' to get crucified. I'm lookin' to stay in one piece."

"I must be crazy to have come here with you," Katie answered.

He put his hand on her arm to hold her. "Hang on a second. Gimme five minutes. I don't get a chance to talk with a kid like you every day."

She shook her head angrily and pushed his hand away. "I never met such a person. Not a spark of feeling—or human kindness in your whole body."

"I wouldn't know about them things. Whatta they do for you excep' get in your way?"

"And when things get in your way"—Katie's voice was rising—"or people, you just get rid of them. Is that your idea?"

"*Listen*," Terry said, suddenly taut, suddenly dry-mouthed, "don't be lookin' at me when you say them things. It wasn't my fault what happened to Joey. Fixin' him wasn't my idea."

"Why, whoever said it was?"

Hell, he had been asked a lot of tough precinct questions and punched around by cops, but this was worse, these goddam soft-voiced innocent questions.

"Well," he began lamely, "I didn't like the way everybody was puttin' the needle on me. You and them bums in the church. And this Father Barry. I didn't like the way he was lookin' at me."

"He was looking at everybody in the same way," she said.

"Oh yeah? I thought he was givin' me the business. Anyhow, what's with this Father Barry? What's his racket?"

"His racket?"

"Yeah, yeah, his racket. You've been off in daisyland, honey. Around here everybody's got a racket."

"But he's a priest."

"Are you kiddin'? So what? The black suit don' make no difference. Everybody looks to get his."

"You don't believe anything, do you? You don't believe anybody?"

He reached over and tried to touch her hand again, but she drew away. "Katie, listen to me. Down here it's every man for himself. It's keepin' alive. It's standin' in with the right people so you c'n get a little change jinglin' in your pocket."

"And if you don't?"

"If you *don't*?" He looked at her wisely, arrogantly, yet with a certain inexpressible sadness. "If you don't, right down—chop." He shook his thumb savagely toward the floor.

Katie shuddered. "That's no better than an alley dog."

Terry drained his glass of beer and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "All right. I'd rather live like an alley dog than wind up like—"

He caught himself. Who was baiting him into this trap? It was a sucker play and he knew it. Something about this straight-talking, freckle-faced, cool little broad.

"Like Joey?" she was saying. "Are you afraid to mention his name?"

"Naah," Terry said quickly, but it sounded more like a cry of pain than a denial. "Only why do ya have to keep harpin' on that? Come on, drink up. You gotta get a little fun outa life. Come on, I'll stick some music on."

She shook her head without looking up at him and picked her coat up off the chair.

"You haven't touched your beer," he said. "Go on, drink it. It'll do you good."

"I don't want it. But why don't you stay? You stay and drink it."

"I got my whole life to drink," Terry said.

She gave him such a look of understanding, sympathy, disapproval, that he could not help blurting out:

"You're not sore at me?"

"What for?"

Again the innocence, the misplaced trust was sharper to take than the back of a copper's hand.

As Katie turned from the table toward the exit, she found her way blocked by a couple of muscular men in rented tuxedos who were snarling at each other, "Don't tell me I didn' see ya, I *saw* ya"—"The hell ya saw me, ya dirty . . ." Then they started swinging at each other. Katie backed away in fright while the bartender hurried over apologetically.

"There's a weddin' inside in the private room. These fellas 're just feelin' good. Celebratin'."

"Yeah," Terry said. "Don' mind them. Come on. I'll get you out through the lobby."

He led her down a narrow paneled corridor which passed the small ballroom rented for private parties. A local five-piece orchestra was playing.

As Terry and Katie paused to look in, the bridal couple dashed past them, escaping from their guests in the semi-darkness. The bride was small and not very pretty. Terry recognized her as the oldest daughter of Joe Finley, a minor City-Hall grafter who had a piece of the loading on Pier B. The kid was Freddie Burns, a checker, moving up in the world. The bridal

gown was lacy white and beautiful, and Katie, bemused by the drink, the confusion, the music and the rainbow effect of the moving lights, was touched by the rented-hall romance of it all.

The five-piece semi-pro band had swung into an oldie, "Avalon." Katie stood at the threshold, lost in the music. Terry wondered what she was thinking. "I met my love in Avalon—beside—the bay: I left my love in Avalon—and sailed—away . . ." the song crooned its simple, heartbreaking logic.

"Guess they forgot to send us our engraved invitations, huh?" Terry tried to arouse a spark in her.

She smiled faintly and he was encouraged. He slid his arms around her, careful not to come too close.

"Come on—you wanna—you wanna spin a little?" She laughed, and before she could say no he was dancing with her in the corridor. He swung her around, expertly; she followed easily, instinctively.

"Ah, you dance divinely," he said with borrowed elegance, and she laughed again. With more confidence now he led her to the edge of the darkened ballroom where they began to whirl among the other dancers.

"The Sisters oughta see ya now," he said with his mouth close to her ear. When she closed her eyes he let his lips touch her hair and slowly move down to her cheek.

The saxophone player had lowered his instrument and risen to his feet to do the vocal. Terry joined in with him softly:

*"And so I think I'll travel on—
To Av—a—lon . . ."*

The band hit a final, conventional chord and the overhead lights came on in an intrusive glare. Terry and Katie were still holding on to each other, caught in the crooning, tin-pan-allegorical mood of the song, when Truck came up to them. Gilly was with him. Truck and Gilly weren't there for any wedding, Terry could see that. They didn't say, Hiya, kid, or anything like that. They were all business, solidly, heavily business.

"I been lookin' all over for you, Terry," Truck said.

One thing about Bohegan, you couldn't hide. It was a mile long and a mile deep and everybody watched everybody else.

"Well, okay?" Terry said.

"The boss wants you." Truck bent his bull neck toward Terry's ear. "He just got a call from Upstairs. Somethin's gone wrong. He's hotter 'n a pistol."

"Well, I gotta take this—this young lady home first," Terry said. "You tell 'im—tell 'im I'll be over after a while."

Truck looked at Gilly, scandalized. "O-kay," he said, the inflection on the last syllable making his meaning unmistakable, "O-kay . . ."

The two Johnny Friendly boys left Terry standing there.

Katie watched them walking rapidly toward the lobby. Terry joined her, shifting uncomfortably. "Who are those . . ." she started to ask.

"Aah, just a couple of—fellas around," Terry said, troubled. "Let's cut outta here. I'll see ya home," Terry said.

It had grown colder as the sun ducked behind the massive ridge of factories marking the western outskirts of the city. They no longer had anything to say to each other. They walked rapidly down Dock Street. Approaching Terry's stoop, a half dozen doors down from the Doyles', Katie was just about to tell him there was no need for him to accompany her any farther when a man in a brown tweed overcoat and a dark brown hat stepped quickly out of the front hallway where he had been waiting. "Mr. Malloy?" he called out to Terry.

Terry swung in surprise at the *mister*. "Yeah?" he said.

The man approached with a pleasant smile. "I've been waiting for you, Mr. Malloy. You're being served with a subpoena, Mr. Malloy."

He handed the unprepossessing sheet of paper to Terry. Terry didn't look at it. He crumpled it into a ball in his hand.

"Be at the State House. Courtroom Nine, at ten o'clock Monday morning," the man said. "You're entitled to bring a lawyer with you. And of course failure to appear means a warrant for

you and an automatic contempt of court. Good day, Mr. Malloy."

"Mister Malloy," Terry said with his hands on his hips, disdainfully, as he watched the man walk away. "Cop!"

"What are you going to do?" Katie said.

Terry had forgotten she was still there. "Tell you one thing," he said viciously. "I aint gonna eat cheese for no cops, and that's for sure."

It was hoodlum talking, pure hoodlum and it aroused a sharp, pure reaction in Katie. "It was Johnny Friendly who killed Joey, wasn't it?" she said.

Terry clenched his fingers around the subpoena. He looked down at his feet. He felt like running, as if he just swiped some stuff off a pushcart and should be getting out of there in a hurry. "Katie . . ." he started to say.

But now Katie was pressing. "He had him killed or had something to do with it, didn't he? He and your brother Charley? Isn't that true?"

"Katie, listen . . ."

"You can't tell me, can you? Because you're part of it. And as bad as the worst of them. Just as bad. Aren't you? Tell me the truth, Terry. Aren't you?"

She was raising her voice, on the verge of tears, and Terry took a step backward and put a hand out as if to calm her.

"Shhh, take it easy, take it easy. You better go back to that school out in daisyland. You're drivin' yourself nuts. You're drivin' me nuts. You're drivin' everybody nuts. Quit worryin' about the truth all the time. Worry about yourself."

Katie lowered her voice, so as not to scream at him. "I should have known you wouldn't tell me. No wonder everybody calls you a bum."

"Don't say that to me, Katie. Don't say that to me now. I'm—I'm tryin' t' keep ya from bein' hurt. Don't you see? What more d'ya want?"

"Much more, Terry," Katie said. "Much much much more."

She turned away abruptly and ran up the street toward her tenement stoop so as not to let him see her crying.

Fourteen

BIG MAC and Gilly and Truck and Sonny and Specs and the rest of them stared at Terry when he entered the back room of Johnny Friendly's bar. They looked at him as if they had never seen him before. Even Charley barely mumbled "Hiya, kid." They were waiting for Johnny Friendly to make the move.

"Well, it's nice of you to drop around," Johnny said as Terry approached. Friendly's eyes were feared around here for their cold-blue dead-pan stare when he was crossed.

"I was comin' over," Terry said carefully. He glanced at Charley.

"Just comin' over here," Johnny said mincingly. Then he made his voice coarser and louder. "How? By way of Chicago?"

Big Mac and one or two others laughed obligingly. Terry tightened his mouth at them and tried to stop Johnny from jabbing him silly with words. "No kiddin', Johnny, I was . . ."

"Shut up, you shlagoom," Johnny said.

He turned to Charley the Gent. "I thought he was gonna keep an eye on that church meeting? I thought you said he could do the job? Some operator you got yourself there, Charley. One more like him and we'll all be wearing striped pajamas."

This time nobody laughed. The silence in the room was like a sudden lack of oxygen. Terry turned to Charley for solace, for support. "I told ya, Charley, it was a big nothin'. The Father did all the talkin'."

Johnny looked around at the group whose indignation was a barefaced copy of his own. "All right, you fellas, beat it," he said. "Everybody but Charley. I want to talk to this shlagoom alone."

They filed out dutifully. Johnny chewed forcefully on the end of his cigar.

"The Father did all the talking," Johnny kept taking Terry's words, crumpling them into hard balls and throwing them back in Terry's face. "Well, this afternoon your goddamn priest took a certain Timothy J. Nolan into a secret session with the Crime Commission and Nolan did all the talking. Now whaddya think of that?"

"You mean little Runty Nolan? The oldtimer? Half gassed alla time?" Terry shrugged. "He don't know much."

"He don't, huh?" Johnny said. Reaching into his inside pocket he pulled out a thick manuscript bent lengthwise, and slammed it down on the table.

"You know what this is?"

Terry shook his head, worried.

"Just thirty-nine pages on the way we operate, that's all."

"How'd you get that?" Terry was impressed.

Johnny gestured with his thumb in the direction of some higher connection. "None of your goddamn business. I got it."

"Never mind, he got it," Charley seconded. "The complete works of Timothy J. Nolan. Hot off the press. Thank Christ it was an executive session and can't be used against us until he testifies in public."

"Charley," Johnny said, "you got the brains to talk, but sometimes you haven't got the brains not to talk. You know what I mean?"

Charley knew what he meant. When the pupils of Johnny's eyes were the size and hardness of buckshot even his intimate friends were cowed.

"Charley, you should've known better than to trust this punched-out kid brother of yours. He was all right hanging around for laughs. But this is business, important business. We're chopping up ten G's a week. I can't afford to have goof-offs messing in my business."

"Now listen, Johnny, how could I tell . . ." Terry tried to cut in.

"I told you shut up. It's too late now. You should've kept an eye on 'em. You should've asked for more troops if you needed help." He turned to Charley again. "Charley, do you realize what this means?" He flipped through the pages of the transcript. "The stuff Nolan's got in here is dynamite. He was around when Willie Givens and Big Tom were gettin' started. He knows where a couple of bodies are buried."

"For Mr. Big it's forty years ago," Charley said. "Statute of limitations."

"Sure, sure," Johnny said. "But it'll be all over the papers. Even if they can't indict him, it won't do Willie Givens any good. And the bunch we got over here in City Hall is pretty shaky. A bad stink now could blow the lid off. I tell you, Charley, I don't like this investigation. I don't like this Father Butinsky."

"Gee, Johnny, I thought I done what I was . . ." Terry tried another half-hearted lead. This time it was Charley who cut him off.

"What the hell are you going around with his sister for?"

"I'm not, I'm not. I was only . . ."

"Johnny, it's that girl," Charley interrupted. "He meets that Doyle broad in the church and whammo, he can't find his way back to his corner." He turned and raised his voice to Terry. "It's an unhealthy relationship."

"Move away from her, stay off her," Johnny ordered. "Unless you're both tired of living. The next week or two is gonna be very touchy. We better have a meeting with Willie Givens tonight, and our legal eagle and some of the other—officials around the harbor. Sort of close ranks."

"We've got to make this investigation look like a union-busting conspiracy," Charley said. "It's a dangerous precedent for the State to investigate or try to control a bonafide labor union."

"Right," Johnny said. "You keep working on that. Talk to some of the reporters friendly with the shipping companies. As for this Nolan—that dirty stooling bastard, we got to find a way

to put the muzzle on him. Thank God we got the best muscle on the waterfront. The time to use it is now, pronto, before that phony priest talks any more of these screwball Nolan bastards into singin' on us."

"How can a little barfly like Runty . . ." Terry started to say.

Johnny Friendly walked over to him until his mouth was shouting in Terry's face. "The only time you talk now is when I ask you something. You know where you're going? Down in the hold. No more cushy jobs in the loft. It's down in the hold with the sweat gang until you learn your lesson."

"It's nice of him to give you any job at all after you goof like that," Charley said.

"Yeah . . . I guess so," Terry said miserably.

"On your way out tell Specs Flavin to come in," Johnny dismissed him.

Terry tried to keep his chin up as he walked out. He walked down to the foot of Dock Street and along the river to a burned-out pier. Terry sat on a charred stump near the river's edge and stared down at the dark, brooding reflection of himself in the filthy water.

Miss Square from Nowhere, he thought. Hell, the way he was going, they were a pair from nowhere.

Fifteen

FATHER BARRY had been up all night working on a report for the Crime Commission hearings. More and more clearly in these few days he had come to see that the shape-up, depending on a surplus of man-power so the hiring boss could pick and choose, was the seat of infection poisoning the labor relations of the harbor.

Why did it still fester in the greatest harbor in the world? That the waterfront racketeers should cling to it for the power

it gave them over the rank-and-file was understandable. But now Father Barry had been reading reports proving conclusively that the association of shipping companies and the leading stevedore companies favored the shape-up too, and, not only that, were closely tied to the mob elements around the harbor through a deeply imbedded system of personal bribery.

At the Crime Commission offices, when he had escorted Runty to the secret session, he had seen the charts. The most respectable shipping and stevedore companies in the harbor had been handing out regular monthly bribes for years to known hoodlums like Johnny Friendly. The harbor was crying out not only for a thorough housecleaning of a corrupted union, not only for a new, modern, humane, efficient method of hiring, but actually for a moral revolution that would prevent prominent Catholic laymen like President Willie Givens and king-maker Tom McGovern from mouthing pious speeches at Communion breakfasts while providing respectable coloration for convicted criminals masquerading as union delegates, shop stewards and hiring bosses.

Father Barry took heart from the knowledge that he wasn't the first priest in the harbor to raise his voice against the moral rot that permitted the underworld to sit at the partnership table with shipping magnates and political leaders. Old Father Mahoney on Staten Island—where Vince Donato ran the docks—had been delivering fiery sermons against this jungle for decades.

But Father Mahoney was a pastor over there and had established his right to speak his mind through two generations of service. Here in Bohegan, Father Barry was still a young curate, and already his Pastor had stopped to talk to him that afternoon about the danger of committing himself too deeply on an issue that might first require discussion with the Bishop. Father Donoghue did not want to discourage his curate's interest in the plight of the parish dock workers, not at all. But sometimes it was better to walk carefully than to rush ahead and stumble. However, as long as Father Barry confined his guidance to local communicants from the docks who came in for assistance, Father

Donoghue could see no objection. He too regretted the brazen self-interest of certain prosperous Catholics. "Just go easy, lad," the aging Pastor advised. "Like mountain climbing. Make sure one foot is securely dug in before you try raising the other."

Father Donoghue was a good, mild man and Father Barry took his remarks both as mild rebuke and mild encouragement. Saying his office that morning, the curate promised to be circumspect and to lend the men as much support as he could without embarrassing his Pastor or needlessly exposing himself.

He had just finished the 11:00 to 12:00 confessions and was on his way to lunch in the rectory dining room, when Moose ran up, out of breath, his big, deceptively tough-looking face livid with anxiety.

"Father, Runty . . . Runty Nolan . . ." he gasped.

"Yes, yes, what happened?"

"His body just washed up to the surface off Pier B. The propellers of the *Elm* churned it up. The sons of bitches, Father."

"Okay, okay. I'll go down with you," Father Barry said. The two men hurried toward the docks.

Runty Nolan was lying under a tarpaulin on the stringpiece. The word had flashed around the bars and up the mouldy tenement stairwells and four or five hundred people had quickly gathered. Terry Malloy, in the middle of the crowd, tried to make himself inconspicuous. He spotted Katie, noticed that she looked pale and frightened, and purposely avoided her glance. He had nothing to do with this. He wished it hadn't happened. He'd miss little Runty and his wise-cracking sass, his clownish face, his crazy courage.

Father Barry came thrusting through the crowd angrily, muttering staccato orders, "One side, gangway, lemme through." When he reached the tarpaulined figure of Runty, he quickly gave him the last rites conditionally. Then he started to speak loudly and rapidly.

"I came down to keep a promise," he began. "I gave Runty Nolan my word that if he stood up to the mob, I'd stand up with him. All the way. Now Runty Nolan is dead. He was one of

those fellers who had the gift of getting up. But this time they fixed him. Oh, they fixed him for good this time. Unless it was an accident, like they'll be saying. Yes, and I'll lay you two to one the police'll go along. Just another accidental drowning for Port Bohegan."

His voice was full of anger. A ferry let go a warning blast in midriver, but nobody looked around. "Some people think the Crucifixion only took place on Calvary," Father Barry continued. "They better wise up. Taking Andy Collins' life a few years ago, the very morning he was supposed to blow the whistle as hiring boss on Pier D, that was a crucifixion. Taking Joey Doyle, to stop him from organizing an honest opposition, to stop him from testifying, that's a crucifixion. And when they give Runty Nolan the river treatment, because he was ready to spill his guts next Monday to the Crime Commission, that's a crucifixion. Every time the mob puts the crusher on a good man, tries to stop him from doing his duty as a union man and a citizen, it's a crucifixion.

"And anybody who lets *this* happen"—he gestured fiercely toward the tarpaulin—"and I mean *anybody*, from the high and mighty shipping company interests, the Police Commissioner and the DA down to the lowliest worker in the hatch—anybody who keeps silent about something he knows has happened—or strongly suspects has happened—shares the guilt of it just as much as the Roman soldier who pierced the flesh of Our Lord to see if he was dead."

In the midst of the crowd, Terry thought, "He's lookin' at me," and lowered his head to hide himself in the anonymity of the clustered longshoremen.

From farther back in the crowd, Truck's gravel voice called out, "Go back to ya choich, Father."

Father Barry pivoted, almost like a fighter, in the direction of his heckler. "Boys, this is my church. I took a vow to follow Christ wherever he might lead me. And if you don't think Christ is down here on this waterfront, you've got another guess coming."

He shouted it in the tone the pier cowboys understood. Now he lowered his voice to speak to the rest of them.

"Every morning when the hiring boss blows his whistle, Christ stands alongside you in the shape-up. Okay, I know that may bring a cynical smile to some of your faces. But take my word for it, Christ stands with you in the shape. He sees the troubled look in the eyes of the family men worried about getting up the rent money and putting meat on the table for the wife and kids. He sees them driven to the loan shark, who's happy to help 'em out—at the rate of ten percent and up. He drove the money changers out of the temple—and where do they wind up?—here on the docks!

"How do you think He feels when He sees His fellow workers selling their souls to the mob for a day's pay? How do you think He feels when He goes to a union meeting—one of those rare, rare union meetings—and sees how it's run? Sees what happens to the one or two stand-up guys who haven't had the last shred of human dignity—yes, dignity in Christ—beaten out of them.

"How does He feel when He walks our neighborhood and counts the number of bars and the horse-rooms and money lenders and looks around in vain for a playground or a community center? What does Christ think of the easy-money boys who pose as your union leaders, sell you out every day in the week and twice on Sunday, and wear two-hundred-dollar suits and sop up the beef gravy at Cavanagh's on your union dues, your vocation fund and your kickback money? Yes, and what does He think of His respectable followers, the shipping executives and the city officials who drop a fin in the basket during Mass and then encourage or condone the goons and the dock bosses who learned their stevedore technique at Sing Sing and Dannemora?

"What must He who established the dignity of work not with words, but with His hands, think about a set-up like this? And how does He who spoke up without fear against every evil feel about your silence?"

Again he seemed to be staring through the other listeners into

the lowered eyes of Terry. Terry pressed forward as close as he could against the broad back of the fellow in front of him. Goddamn the priest and his big mouth. Goddamn Charley and his big ideas too. Goddamn everybody and everything that drew him into this. The prolonged bass whistle of an ocean-going freighter competed for a moment with the angry blast from Father Barry.

"You want to know what's wrong with our waterfront?" the priest began slowly when the sound of the ship's whistle faded away. "It's love of a lousy buck. It's making love of a buck—the fat profit—the wholesale stealing—the cushy job—more important than the love of man. It's forgetting that every fellow down here is your brother, yes, your brother in Christ."

The word *Christ* wasn't spread over them softly as a balm. It was hurled at them as a gauntlet, as a furious challenge. "Fellows," Father Barry seemed to be speaking to each one personally, "no matter how tough it gets—and it looks to me like it's gonna get tougher before it gets better—remember, Christ is always with you. He shapes with you every morning, in winter rain or ninety-degree heat. He's in the hatch. He's in the union hall. He's in the bars. He's kneeling here beside Nolan. And He's saying to all of you: If you do it to the least of mine, you do it to me. What better slogan could an honest union have? What they did to Andy Collins, what they did to Joey Doyle, what they just did to Runty Nolan, they're doing to you, and you, and you. All of you! And only you, with God's help, have the power to knock 'em out of the box for good!"

Then he said an Our Father and announced, "There will be a requiem Mass for Timothy J. Nolan at ten o'clock Saturday." He turned to the covered figure, silenced at last under its tarpaulin. He made the sign of the Cross, looked around at everybody and gave voice to a harsh, "Amen."

Pop Doyle hurried up to shake his hand. Katie followed her father silently. The blood was drained from her face. This second killing so soon after Joey's had carried her into a state beyond her fresh-eyed militance of a few days earlier. But the loss of Runty had an opposite effect on Pop.

"Father, I'm with ya," Pop said. "I don't care what they do to me now. I'm takin' my chances with ya."

Sixteen

FATHER BARRY began his day with the six-o'clock Mass. The attendance was better than usual because the priest had won new allies when he pulled no punches in his send-off to Runty on the docks. Most of them had held back from joining Father Barry openly, but now they got up an hour early and joined the early Mass as a way of showing silent approval of Father Barry's guts.

The men went out into the pale winter morning to get some eggs and coffee in them before showing up at the piers. There was scattered talk of a wildcat one-day strike to protest the push-off of Runty Nolan.

Father Barry was removing his vestments in the sacristy when Father Vincent handed him the *Bohegan Graphic*. "You made the front page," the priest said to his fellow curate.

A reporter from the local tab had been in the crowd when Runty's body was recovered. Father Barry's attack on the "evil triumvirate" of shippers, city officials and union racketeers was spread over two columns. "I haven't seen the Manhattan papers yet, but I hear they covered it too," Father Vincent said. "Well, you asked for it, kid. You're a celebrity."

Father Barry shrugged. "I called it the way I saw it. They can't hang me for that."

"Not with a rope, no," Father Vincent agreed with him. "But when you step on the toes of the Police Commissioner, City Hall, the longshore headquarters and the Interstate Stevedores you're treading on some powerful digits."

"The bigger they are . . ." Father Barry shrugged.

"The harder *you* fall," Father Vincent warned as he muttered the last of his vesting prayers.

When Father Barry returned to the rectory, all hell was breaking loose. Reporters from the metropolitan newspapers were calling for interviews. A delegation of longshoremen from the West Side, across the river, had come over to ask for advice on how to organize opposition to the criminal clique that had their local sewed up. At 9:30 an assistant counsel from the Crime Commission called to make an appointment. He wanted to discuss the possibility of Father Barry's appearing as a friendly witness at the waterfront hearings. The priest could testify as to what the deceased Nolan had told him of corruption and violence in Bohegan. Also, a Commission investigator had informed the counsel that Father Barry was working on a plan for harbor reform.

Father Barry made dates to meet the press and the Commission counsel, and was conferring with Jimmy Sharkey, Moose and Dino Lorenzo, a tough Jersey City recruit, when word came that the Pastor wanted to see him.

"Pete, I'm troubled by these headlines," the elderly Pastor said. "I feel you have, well, not exactly disobeyed my orders, but chosen to ignore my advice. As you know, I am not at all opposed to what you are doing. I have come to agree that the waterfront workers in our parish do need our help. But there are ways to do these things. Discretion is often the better part of valor. And I could hardly say you were discreet in these remarks of yours on the docks. Before you went so far as to impugn the character of our local officials I should have liked to prepare the ground a little bit with the Bishop. We're only a small church, one of the poorest in his diocese. But I must say he has always treated me very decently. Now I'm afraid Monsignor O'Hare, whose position I realize is diametrically opposed to your own, will undoubtedly have a chance to influence the Bishop against you. I might even say *us*—before we have a chance to explain what we are trying to do."

"Father, believe me, I never intended to buck your authority, or your good advice," Father Barry said quickly. "It's just that events got behind me and started pushing me faster 'n faster. I

had no idea they were going to get Runty when I promised to do my work from inside the church yesterday morning. And when I got down there, Father, and thought of the stinking evil of this thing, I guess I did blow my cork and I hit 'em with that stuff about Christ in the shape-up."

"And very moving it was. Just the same I'm worried for you. I want to see you continue this work. I think you can help us build a strong, more meaningful parish, closer to God. What I'd like to do," Father Donoghue said frankly, "is to preserve the quality of your fervor within the bounds of—well, not expediency—shall we say practicality?"

"You don't want to see me take such a lead off first base that I get cut down and blow my chance of sliding home with the winning run." Father Barry grinned.

"I believe that expresses the idea," Father Donoghue smiled. "Now to get down to cases. I'm afraid I will have to forbid you to form a Longshoremen's Committee of St. Timothy's. I understand that was to be the name of it. I feel that would involve us far too directly in the interunion conflicts of the waterfront."

"Check," Father Barry said. "How about the basement chapel? Can we still use it for the protest meeting on Runty Nolan the boys are getting up for Sunday night? It's the eve of the Crime Commission hearings. Runty wasn't the most conscientious parishioner we ever had, but he did manage to show up for Mass whenever he was sober enough to find his way."

"If you can put the proof in my hands—in case the Bishop should call for it—that such a meeting cannot be held safely any place else in Bohegan. In that case I'll go along."

"And our mimeograph machine? The boys want to hand out a leaflet on Runty. He was popular with a lot of the fence-sitters. They want to run off what I said on the dock yesterday—and pass it out along the waterfront."

Father Donoghue sighed. "Since you have said it, I suppose they have a right to circulate it. As far as you are concerned it is a calculated risk. You'll find longshoremen and the business

and political interests lining up for and against—er, Barryism. I think it would be best if our church was not associated with that. In other words, I want to make it very clear what you are forbidden to do, what you are permitted to do with my authority and protection, and what you may do on your own as an American citizen expressing your own opinion.”

“Thanks for laying it on the line,” Father Barry said.

The careworn but oddly boyish face of the old priest lit up with a faint smile. “If some of our parishioners want to borrow the mimeograph machine to run off something on their own, I don’t believe I would have any objection.”

“Father, I couldn’t ask for more than that,” Father Barry said. “You’re solid.”

“I’m a feeble reed leaning on the mercy of our Lord,” said Father Donoghue. “But I’m an old reed. I’ve weathered some storms.”

“And you’re shoring this house against the next one,” Father Barry said.

“Which reminds me,” the Pastor said. “Be sure you don’t slack off on any of your parish duties. You’d better not leave yourself vulnerable on any count right now. Arm yourself against the charge that you’re shirking your regular responsibilities in order to interfere in a labor dispute.”

“Which reminds *me*,” Father Barry said. “I only have five minutes to wash up before hearing confessions.” He took his leave of the old Pastor, who would never be more than a poor parish priest, and for reasons that Father Barry was beginning to appreciate.

In the stuffy confession box Father Barry tried to lose himself in the frailties of the poor sinners who mumbled through the dark screen their misdeeds and wrong thoughts, their mortal and venal commissions and omissions.

When he stepped out of the box he still had a great many things to do before lunch, including a call on Mrs. Glennon to find out if her wayward husband Beanie was bringing the money

home. Otherwise Father Barry would have to track him down and get it off him before he spread it around the bars.

Sitting in an empty pew was the young tough who had shown up at the basement meeting for Joey—Terry Malloy. He rose quickly when he saw the priest. "Hey, I wanna talk to ya," he said gruffly.

"You mean you're waiting to be heard in there?" Father Barry said, thumbing toward the booth.

"Yeah, yeah. I guess so," Terry said uncomfortably. "I gotta talk to somebody. I need a —. How's about you stick your head back in there"—Terry nodded toward the confessional—"and listen to me a minute."

"How long has it been since you've been in this church—any church?" Father Barry asked.

Terry shrugged. "I dunno. I think I come in with Charley Easter a year ago."

"You've been pretty far away from us," Father Barry said. "I don't think you're ready to go to confession. Why don't you get back in the swing, and start examining your conscience?"

"Lissen, Father, do you have to make such a big deal out of it? I got somethin' I wanna tell ya."

"What brought you here, Terry? Can you tell me that first?"

"I'm here, aint that enough? That stuff you was sayin' on the dock yesterday about Runty. Sure, I know Runty was gettin' ready to stool but"—he hunched his shoulders in an expressive helpless gesture again—"but he had balls. He got a lot of kicks out of life. And then this Doyle broad. And those goddamn pigeons of Joey's. I tell ya, Father, it's got me so I gotta come in here and sit down to find out what gives with me."

"Kid, I've got to change into my street clothes and make a call," Father Barry said. "Sure, something's eating you. That's your conscience. It's been buried in there pretty deep. I've got to run now. Why don't you stay here and pray? Try St. Jude. He's a saint of desperate cases. Ask him to intercede for you. Maybe something'll happen." He started rapidly toward the sacristy. "I'll see you later."

"Hey," Terry called after him, but Father Barry was hurrying down the side aisle.

A few minutes later, when Father Barry came down the steps of the church, two at a time, Terry was outside waiting for him.

"What is this, a brush-off?" Terry said.

"That was a real quickie of a prayer," Father Barry said, crossing the street into the park.

"Lissen, Father, I don't wanna pray. Hell, why kid ya, I'd be fakin' it if I prayed. But I got somethin' that feels like it's bustin' me open inside—like a fist was in there beltin' me from the inside . . ."

Father Barry kept walking.

"Lissen to me, goddamn it, don't pull that high-and-mighty stuff," Terry half begged, half bullied. "Hell, the other night you was beggin' for someone to give you a lead on Joey Doyle."

Father Barry stopped and studied him. "Oh? You got a lead?"

"Lead, hell." Terry almost shouted. "It was me, Father. I'm the one who set Joey Doyle up for the knock-off."

"Well, I'll be damned," Father Barry said.

"Now this is strictly between you and I," Terry said.

"I don't want it that way," Father Barry said. "When you're ready Father Vincent can hear your confession. I want to be free to use whatever you tell me."

"Listen, it's you I feel like tellin' this to. I'm takin' a chance you won't rat on me."

"I'm making no deals, Terry. I won't rat on you, as you put it. But you'll have to ride along on my judgment. Now come on. Let's keep walking and give it to me straight. Spill or button up. Go on, I'm listening."

"Well, it started as a favor," Terry began, and then the thumb of truth pressed against the sides of the inflamed lie and the pus oozed out in a relieving flow:

"Favor? Who'm I kiddin'? They call it a favor, but you know their favors—it's do it, or else. So this time the favor turns out to be helpin' them whop Joey. But, Father, I didn't know that. I figgered they was only goin' to lean on 'im a little bit. Honest

t' God, Father, I never figgered they was goin' t' go all the way."

"You thought they'd just work him over, and that didn't bother you," Father Barry said.

"Yeah, yeah, I thought they'd talk to 'im, try 'n straighten 'im out, maybe push 'im aroun' a little bit, that's all."

"And what I said on the dock yesterday about silence, that's what brought you to me?"

"Well, sorta. I'll tell ya the truth, Father. It's that girl. The Doyle broad. She's got a way of lookin' at me. I wanna yell out the whole goddamn truth. I didn't know they made 'em like that. She's so square, it's funny. I walk down the street with her and I feel like—well, like I'm back in trainin'."

"What are you going to do about this?" Father Barry cut him off brusquely.

"What d'ya mean, do? What d'ya mean?"

"You think you should know a thing like this and keep it to yourself?"

"I told ya, this was just between you and I," Terry said quickly.

"In other words you're looking for an easy out," Father Barry said. "You tell it to me so I can help you carry the load. But it's still an open cesspool for other people to fall into—and drown in. Like Runty Nolan. Well? What are you going to do about it?"

"I dunno. I dunno. It's like carryin' a monkey around on your back."

Father Barry nodded. "A question of who rides who."

They had reached the grilled fencing at the far end of the park. Beyond them at the river's edge a giant pile driver began pounding an ear-shattering rhythm. A new pier was under construction.

"I'm no rat," Terry said. "And if I spill, my life aint worth a home-made nickel."

Father Barry stopped walking and grabbed Terry's arm in a tight grip. "Listen, I think you've got to tell Katie Doyle. I think you owe it to her. I know it's a hell of a thing to ask you, but I think you ought to tell her."

Terry pulled his arm away angrily. "Hell, ya don't ask much, do ya?"

"Never mind, forget it." Father Barry said abruptly. "I'm not asking you to do anything. It's your own conscience that's got to do the asking." He walked away from Terry, down the steps, out of the park. "Good luck," he said crisply over his shoulder.

"Is that all you got to say to me?" Terry called after him. He hated this smart-aleck priest, but he didn't want him to walk away. He didn't want to be left alone.

"You want to have it both ways, brother," Father Barry called back over his shoulder. "Well, you got it."

The pile driver had been silent for a few moments, but now it swung into action again, pounding pounding pounding its steel pilings down through the soft bottom muck to the river floor. Pound! Pound! Pound! Pound! It echoed through all of Port Bohegan.

"Goddamn the goddamn noise," Terry said, with his hand to his head. He wished he was a carefree kid again, running from the cops, swimming in the scummy river and watching his birds skim across the sky.

Back on the roof tending his birds again, Terry was able to sidestep his troubles for a while. Sitting on an upturned box, watching his birds, he heard someone come up on the roof three houses away. It was Katie. When she lingered at Joey's coop, Terry didn't know whether to call over to her or not. "Don't see her no more," Johnny had ordered. "You owe it to Katie to tell her the truth," Father Barry had insisted. Terry felt like a one-man tug of war with his body on both ends and his head in the middle. "Kee—rist," he said out loud.

Katie turned from the coop on the other roof and came toward Terry.

"I was hoping I'd find you up here," she said. "I was thinking about Joey's birds. We have got to get rid of them. Pop says the butcher will take them, but I . . ." She paused and he was very close to her and again he felt the urge to touch her cheek,

put his arms around her, but of course he wouldn't dare. In his whole tenement-roof, poolhall and street-corner life he had never been unsure of himself with any girl before. "But I—I thought maybe you could take them in with yours," she continued. "At least they'd have a nice life. I know you'd take good care of them. I could trust you for that."

"Sure, sure. Anything you say," Terry mumbled. Then he took a small step forward, a big step inwardly. "Katie, listen to me," Terry said. "I"—he reached back for Father Barry's words—"owe it to ya to tell ya somethin'."

"You do?"

"It's been jabbin', jabbin' in my mind ever since that night in the church," he said. With a terrible panic he looked at her a moment. Then he plunged in. "Katie, I—I just told the Father what I did—what I did to Joey."

She put her face in her hands and shook her head into them. "No . . ."

"What I did to Joey," he raised his voice to overcome the insistent pounding of the pile-driver. Unconsciously Katie moved her hands from her face until they were pressing against her ears. Terry went on shouting, the guilt pouring out of him in a relieving purge—*lissen—lissen—my brother Charley—and Johnny—good to me—a favor—the pigeon—got Joey to the roof—Specs and Sonny—the guilt and filth of it pouring out of him into Katie's innocent, no longer trusting face.*

"Katie, I'm tellin' the truth. I'm not holdin' nuthin' back. I set Joey up for 'em. But, Katie, honest to God, I didn' look to see 'im killed. I didn' know. I DIDN' KNOW . . ." The pile-driver paused, as if to catch its steam-engine breath. It was suddenly still. Terry lowered his voice almost to a whisper now. "Katie . . . Katie . . . I never thought they'd . . ."

"You never thought *anything*—except how to stuff your mouth or your pockets," Katie said with a fierceness that lashed Terry with a steel tip because it was so unexpected in her. "You weren't killing him or not killing him. You were just looking out as usual for number one."

He put his hand out, tentatively to restrain her, but she turned and ran across the roof.

Okay, he did it, he did it, he was thinking. Now what? What's the deal? He had felt a kind of crazy exhilaration to get the thing off his chest to Katie. And now—nothing. He felt tired and just wanted to stretch out and be quiet—like after a hard ten-round fight. The pile-driver began its pounding again. Goddamn it, would it never quit? Was there never gonna be no peace nowhere? He envied Runty Nolan, wherever he was. At least he didn't have to make any more moves.

Seventeen

THE GATHERING of Johnny Friendly's "pistol local" officials in the weather-beaten office on the wharf was only one of a chain of meetings going on in the longshoremen's union offices all along the Jersey waterfront and around the harbor from Staten Island, the West, South and East Sides of Manhattan and far out into Brooklyn. There had been emergency sessions of the District Council. High-up members of the syndicate had flown up from hideouts in Miami and Hollywood, Florida, to help work out a common strategy for the dock bosses who were being subpoenaed.

In other words, the heat was on. The Crime Commission had an order to call in and examine all the union books. Company records were being subpoenaed. There were rumors that stevedore officials, faced with proof in canceled checks or confiscated payrolls—or a telltale absence of records—were talking in order to shift the blame away from the "respectable" shipping associations and onto the muscular shoulders of the crime boys who had been running the longshore locals as private mobs.

Johnny Friendly was the strength in the Bohegan sector. The

thing to do was to close ranks and hang on, hard. "Tough it out" was Johnny's motto. Admit nothing. Bull it through.

Sitting with him was Charley and Truck and Gilly and his hiring bosses, Big Mac, Socks Thomas and Flat-top Karger who had just been paroled on a manslaughter rap. Specs and Sonny had beat it to Florida as soon as Father Barry raised his stink on the dock. Johnny would have to stake them until the heat was taken off.

There was no gavel here and no solemn oaths, but everybody knew that a court was in session, with Johnny as judge, jury and prosecutor, Terry Malloy on trial in absentia and his glib brother Charley on the anxious seat for the first time. The groundswell of resentment against Terry for hanging around the Doyle girl had mounted with reports of his having gone back to the church to see Barry.

Charley took a deep breath and made an effort to trade on his slightly educated gift of gab. "Terry's done a few favors for us, Johnny. We mustn't forget that," he said. "It's simply that this girl and maybe the priest too have begun exerting some kind of influence over him that's, well, that's affecting his mental attitude. See what I mean?"

This had been velvet talk for confusing honest members of the District Council or a militant wage-scale delegate. But Johnny had no patience with it now.

"Goddamn it," he shouted. "I aint interested in that mental-attitude crap. We're in a bi-state investigation. This aint no two-bit city deal Willie Givens c'n talk or buy his way out of. This one is make or break. Your little brother can hang us. All I want t' know is, is he D 'n D or is he a canary?"

Charley took a long time answering. Whatever Charley said, he would have to deliver on it. No one was safe around Johnny who didn't deliver on his word. In his own way, according to his own rules, he was a fanatic for the truth.

"I—wish—I—knew," Charley mouthed his answer deliberately.

"So do I, Charley," Johnny said. "We're not playing for marbles. This is business. There's no room for goof-balls in this business. It's time to straighten out that brother of yours."

"Straighten out how?" Charley asked, in the fewest possible words this time.

"Okay, all you fellas, vamoose," Johnny said to his local officials and collection boys. He trusted them, but there was no sense in having extra witnesses. This was best between him and Charley, so the rest of them could plead with a straight face they knew nothing about it.

As soon as they were out of there Johnny said, "Look, it's simple. Drive him out to the place we've been using. Try to straighten him out on the way over. Maybe stake him and ship him out somewhere. But if he won't play, if he tries to stiff ya, you'll have to turn him over to Danny D."

Danny D. was a black flag on the waterfront, an old Murder, Inc. boy who did jobs on order. He had beaten half a dozen murder raps.

The name Danny D. thickened Charley's tongue. "Danny D. Johnny, you can't do that. I mean, all right, maybe the kid's out of line. But Jesus, Johnny, I can handle him. He's just a confused kid. Johnny, I love ya, you know that. Anything you asked me, I was always there, you know that. But Johnny, this thing you're askin' here, I can't do that. I just can't do that, Johnny."

"Then don't," Johnny said.

"But Johnny, it's my kid brother."

"If it was *my* kid brother," Johnny said, "hell, if it was my own mother, God bless 'er, I'd have to do it if they crossed me. I aint sayin' I'd like it. I'm just tellin' ya what ya have to do if ya wanna be a real man in this business. The men and the boys get separated awful fast when it gets hot."

"Jesus Christ Almighty," Charley said. He could feel the sweat running into his pants.

"Okay, on your horse, deep thinker," Johnny Friendly ordered.

Charley tried to make his exit casual, but the blood was run-

ning out of his face and his silk, white-on-white, twenty-dollar Sulka shirt was sticking to his skin.

Terry was lying on his bed, skimming through a racing-pigeon magazine and trying to get his mind off the squeeze he was in. He had the door locked. He wasn't going out any more that evening. Where could he go? Who was there left to see? The mob was off him and the friends of Joey Doyle wanted no part of him. The priest had given him a hard time, and finally when he did what this Barry had softened him up to do, the girl had run away from him as if he was a one-man epidemic or something.

There was a knock on the door and he half rose, tensing at the threat of intrusion. "Yeah?"

"Hey, kid, it's Charley," the voice came through the door.

Terry jumped up to let him in. Charley looked big and prosperous in his camel's hair coat. "Listen, kid, get your jacket on. We're going to the fights."

"Jees, I been so . . . I didn't even notice who's on the card," Terry said.

"What difference?" Charley said. "A couple of tough niggers like it always is these days. I got a good pair, first row behind the press."

"I been wantin' to talk to ya," Terry said.

"Get your jacket on. We'll have time to talk on the way."

Usually there wasn't a cab for blocks, but tonight they found one on the corner. It was mean, early December weather, with hard rain crystallizing into sleet. "Where to?" said the cab driver.

"Turn left on Bedford," Charley said. "I'll tell you where to stop."

"I thought we was goin' to the Garden," Terry said.

"Sure, but—I want to cover a bet on the way over," Charley said. "Anyway it'll give us a little more time to talk, Terry. I want you and I should have a serious talk."

"Mmmmm-mmmm," Terry said, watching carefully.

"Of course the boys know you too well to put you down for a

cheese-eater. Just the same they think you shouldn't be on the outside so much," Charley went on. "They want you a little more on the inside. They think it's time you had a few little things going for you down there."

Terry shrugged. "A steady job. A couple extra potatoes, that's all I want."

"Sure, that's all right when you're a kid," Charley agreed. "But you're getting on. You're pushing thirty pretty soon, slugger. It's time you got a little ambition."

"Well, I always figured I'd live longer without it," Terry said.

Charley looked at him and then turned his head away and lowered his eyes. "Maybe," he said. Then to cover his feelings, he added quickly, "Look, kid, you know this new pier they're building, it's going to be a beaut—two million bucks. The Pan-American Line is coming in there and our local's going to have the jobs. There'll be a new slot for a boss loader."

"So?" Terry said.

"You know the set-up," Charley said. "Six cents a hundred pounds on everything that goes into a truck. It don't sound so big, but it snowballs. And the lovely part is, you don't have to lift a finger. I think it's the sweetest touch in the harbor. It's three, four hundred dollars a week just for openers. Guys like Turkey Dooley and Dummy Ennis can do thirty, forty G a year and pay tax on five. That's how I see you, kid. A month in Miami every winter."

"And I get all that dough for not doin' nothin'?" Terry said.

"Absolutely nothing," Charley said. "You do nothing. And you say nothing. You understand, don't you, kid?"

Terry sighed and shook his head, struggling with his unfamiliar problem. "Yeah, I guess I do. But there's more to this than I thought, Charley. I'm telling you. A lot more."

Charley was disturbed to see how shaken his brother was. "Terry, listen to me," he said sharply. "I hope you're not trying to tell me you're thinking of testifying against . . ." He pointed a suede-gloved thumb in the direction of his immaculate camel's hair coat. "Kid, I hope you're not telling me *that*."

Terry rubbed the back of his hand across his face. "I don't know, Charley. I mean, that's what I want to talk to you about. I wish I could tell ya what it's like, Charley—this goddamn makin' up your mind."

Charley prided himself on his good manners, on his intelligence and reserve, but now the frustration and the danger exploded something in him and without knowing what he was doing he reached into his shoulder holster and pulled out a short-handled .38. "You're going to take the job, whether you like it or not. And keep your goddamn mouth shut. No back talk. Just take it!"

When Terry saw the gun in the folds of the overcoat, he was not frightened; the shock of this final gesture seemed to carry him beyond fear into a state of stunned, intuitive compassion he had never known before.

"Charley . . ." he said sadly, embarrassed for both of them. He reached out and gently turned the barrel to one side.

Charley leaned back against the seat and lowered the gun into his lap. He took an initialed handkerchief out of his breast pocket and mopped his face. "Please take it," Charley whispered. "Take that job."

Terry had pulled away into his corner of the back seat. He was still shaking his head in shock and disappointment. "Charley—oh, Charley."

There was silence for perhaps ten seconds, while Terry continued to stare at Charley and Charley looked anxiously into Terry's face and saw the days of their youth, saw Terry the dirty-faced urchin and Terry the twelve-year-old gutter fighter and Terry in his flashy towel robe prancing in his corner as he waited for the bell.

"Okay, okay . . ." Charley was fighting himself for a decision. He glanced out to see how close they were to the isolated two-story frame house casually identified by the Danny D. crowd as "the gashouse." "I'm gonna tell 'em I—I'll tell 'em I couldn't find you. Ten to one he won't believe me, but . . ." He quickly reached into his pocket and slipped Terry the gun.

"Here, you may need it." Then he leaned forward and slid open the glass partition between them and the front seat. "Hey, driver, pull over." He opened the door while the car was still moving. "Jump out, quick, and keep going." He slapped Terry hard on the back. Half a block down was a suburban bus. Terry shouted to hail it and ran toward it down the dark, glistening road.

Charley leaned back against the seat, exhausted. "Now turn around, driver," he said wearily, his eyes closed. "Take me to the Garden."

The driver made a violent left turn that half threw Charley to the floor, high-balled his car up into Danny D.'s driveway, and sped right on into the garage, where a couple of specialists had been stationed to handle what came in. Charley Malloy opened his mouth to protest, but the men knew their work and he never said another word.

Eighteen

WHEN THE bus dropped Terry off on a side street near the center of Bohegan he jumped out and kept on running for half a dozen blocks through the hard, slanting rain until he came to the Doyle tenement. He raced up the stale, creaky stairs two and three at a time, carried along by an obsession that had seized him and driven away all sense of safety and precaution. It was the image of Katie Doyle's turning her back on him after his confession that tormented him—her cutting angry words, her running away. His mind was a motor propelling him forward. He reached the fourth-story landing, ran to the door and shouted: "Katie! Katie!"

Katie was in bed, trying to sleep. Pop was out with Moose and Jimmy and the door was latched. "You can't come in. Get away from here!" she shouted angrily.

"Katie, please open the door. I gotta talk to you."

He kicked at the door and she screamed, "Stop it! Stop it! Stay away from me."

She made sure the latch was fastened and hurried back into her narrow bedroom and tried to push her metal bed over against the door. She was terrified by the sound of Terry's body crashing against the flimsy wood of the kitchen door. Then she heard the sound of the latch giving and Terry was rushing in on her.

"Get out of here—out of here!" she shrieked, and when he tried to come close to her, whimpering, "Katie, lissen . . ." she shook her head and said, "If Pop finds you in here, he'll kill you. You've got to stay away from me."

As he came closer she leaped from the bed and hurled herself against him, trying to push him back out of the room. He held her off, gripping her arms hard and shouting into her face, "You think I stink, don't you? You think I stink for what I done."

She wrenched herself free and said furiously, "I don't want to talk about it. I just want you to . . ."

"I know what you want me to do," he cut in.

"I don't want you to do anything except get out of here and—let your conscience tell you what to do."

"Shut up about that conscience." He beat his right fist viciously against the metal bedpost Katie had tried to use as a barrier. "Why d'ya hafta keep usin' that goddamn word?"

She backed away, still fearful of him, but fearful for him too. "Why, Terry, I never mentioned that word to you before. Never."

He stopped, surprised and dazed. "No?"

She shook her head. She was no longer afraid of him. "You're beginning to listen to yourself," she said. "That's where that word is coming from."

"Katie," he said quietly, "don't get sore now. But I—I guess it's somethin'—somethin' what ya feel when, well, when you're in love with somebody."

Again he wanted to put his arms around her and hold her close and kiss her and bury his face in the sweet warmth of her

neck. But he only stood there, staring at her. And strangely there was an overwhelming impulse in Katie now against every habit and belief to throw herself, barely dressed, shamelessly into his arms.

"Terry, please—not now—let's talk about it—some other time," she said. "Now you have to go—please."

"Okay, okay, forget I said it," Terry mumbled. "I got no right . . ." He started to turn away. "I'm sorry about that door."

From the courtyard behind the tenement came a muffled cry, "Hey, Terry. Hey, Terry . . ."

Startled, Terry hurried into the kitchen and peered down the fire-escape. He couldn't see anybody in the darkness, but he heard the voice, louder this time. "Hey, Terry, your brother's down here. He wants to see you."

"Charley?" Terry called out the window into the courtyard.

"Come on down—he's waitin' fer ya," the strange voice answered from below.

"I gotta go down," Terry said, climbing out to the fire-escape.

"Terry, please be careful," Katie cried out after him as he started down the fire-escape through the sleeting rain.

"We're over here, Terry, over here," the muffled voice rose through the darkness.

Katie could hear Terry's metallic steps hurrying down the fire-escape. Across the narrow courtyard, strung with clothes-lines, a window opened two stories below. A woman put her head out and looked up toward Katie. It was Mrs. Collins.

"You hear that?" she called.

Katie nodded, holding her arms around her shoulders against the bitter cold.

"It's the same way they called my Andy out the night I lost him," Mrs. Collins said.

Katie ran to the closet and pulled out her cloth coat. Then, heedless of Mrs. Collins' cries, she started down the fire-escape, crying down into the winter night. "Terry! Terry!"

The space between the tenements, built back to back, led into

a narrow alley. Katie thought she heard a sound in that direction and hurried toward it, calling Terry's name. As she neared the alleyway, Terry answered her in a strained, hurt voice. "I'm over here."

She ran toward him and found him staring at the lifeless figure of Charley Malloy, hanging by his camel's hair coat collar from a cargo hook fixed to the wooden alley wall. The usually spotless golden-tan coat was soiled and blood had stained the lapel. Katie gasped but made no other sound. Terry was trembling with hatred.

"I'll take it out of their skulls," he said.

He had the gun in his hand. He kept staring at Charley. He didn't seem aware of Katie at all. He walked over to the wall and lifted Charley down. He stretched Charley out with his hands folded together at his waist.

"Look at the way the sons of bitches got his coat all dirty," he said.

"Terry, you're crazy," Katie said. "Give me that gun. You sound like you're going crazy."

Terry pushed the small revolver securely into his pocket. "Go get the Father," he ordered. "Tell him to take care of Charley. Charley was a Catholic. He's got to have it right. I don't want he should have to lay out in this stinkin' alley too long."

He started down the alley toward the street.

"Where are you going?" Katie called shrilly.

"Never you mind," Terry said. "Just do like I say." He kept on walking, not once looking back to see if Katie was carrying out his orders and hurrying toward the church. She was, however, running sobbingly through the foul-weather night and reaching the church nearly at the same time Terry was entering the Friendly Bar.

A dozen regulars were lined up at the bar looking at the fight on TV.

"Johnny Friendly here?" Terry said abruptly from the entrance.

Jocko, the horse-faced bartender, couldn't see the gun on

Terry, but he sensed that he had one. In his ten years' service behind this bar he had become an uncanny judge of these things.

"He's not in now," he said curtly. Usually he was a good friend of Terry's, with plenty of cuff where the kid was concerned. But now he knew things were wrong. He didn't have to be told. He could smell trouble.

"You sure?" Terry said and slowly walked the length of the bar to the door of the back room. Most of the customers took their eyes off the television screen to watch Terry. When Johnny Friendly was on the warpath, the harbor of Bohegan was alive to it. Some of the regulars even stayed away from the bars.

Terry kicked open the door to the back room. Then he went back to the end of the bar and waved Jocko over. "A double shot."

"Take it easy now, Terry," Jocko said.

"Don't gimme no advice. Gimme the shot."

Jocko gave a big-shouldered shrug and filled two jiggers. "Look, kid, why don't you go home before the boss gets here?"

Terry gulped the contents of the little glasses. "I'm not buyin' advice, I'm buyin' whiskey," Terry said.

Father Barry was in the small rectory library when Katie burst in. Her hair was wet and she was out of breath and almost incoherent.

But when he heard that Charley was dead and that Terry had a gun and was talking out of his head with grief, Father Barry jumped up and said he'd go out and find him. If Terry was gunning for Johnny, there were only a few places to look—the union office, the Friendly Bar, the local political club.

"Don't worry, I'll find him," Father Barry promised. "Get Father Vincent for Charley. Call your uncle at the station house. Tell him where Charley is. And ask him to see you home."

It was only when he was trotting down the block with the sleet now turning to wet snow in his face that Father Barry wondered if this unexpected mission was a defiance of the Pastor's orders.

But where did approved Christian charity for the Glennons leave off and a battle for a more Christian life for all of them here in Bohegan begin? Terry Malloy, trying to crawl out of the slime, was part of that battle.

Terry was crouched down against the bar with his hand ready to reach the gun when the door began to open. Everybody was watching as the door squeaked ajar. Everybody was surprised when in walked a priest.

Father Barry spotted Terry quickly and he came right on walking until he was halfway down the bar from him.

"I want to see you, Terry," Father Barry said.

"You got eyes. I'm right in front of you," Terry sneered. "What d'ya want from me?"

"Your gun," Father Barry said, close enough now to put his hand out for it. "Give me that gun. I'm not going out of here without it."

"You go to hell," Terry said.

"What did you say?" Father Barry's face reddened.

"Go to hell!"

As a youngster, Father Barry had fought in the streets and the punch he threw now seemed to come from him naturally. It was a right-hand driven hard from the shoulder and it caught Terry by surprise and off balance and knocked him down.

"Let me help you up," Father Barry said.

Terry pushed him away hysterically. "Get away! Keep your hands off me! It's none of yer business."

"You want to hurt Johnny Friendly?" Father Barry talked right through him. "You want to hurt him? You want to fix him? Do you? You really want to finish him?"

"Goddamn right," Terry said.

"For what he did to Charley," Father Barry poured it on. "And a lot of men who were better than Charley. Then don't fight 'im like a hoodlum down here in the jungle. Sure, that's just what he wants. He'll hit you in the head and plead self-defense. And beat that rap like he beat all the others. Now listen to me,

Terry, the way to fight him is in the hearings with the truth. Hit him with the truth, instead of with that—that cap pistol of yours.”

Slowly Terry had begun to listen. He frowned and screwed up his face as if it were hurting.

“Get rid of the gun,” Father Barry said. “Unless you haven’t got the guts. Because if you haven’t, you’d better hang on to it.”

Terry took the gun out of his pocket and studied it thoughtfully. Father Barry’s lips were dry.

“If you don’t want to give me that gun, leave it here,” Father Barry said.

On the wall in the back of the bar was a framed picture, taken in happier days, of Johnny Friendly and Charley Malloy flanking their International president, Willie Givens.

“The hell with it,” Terry said aloud, and hurled the gun over the bar into the middle of the glass-encased picture. “Tell Johnny I was here.”

Father Barry gave an audible sigh of relief when they got outside.

“I’m going to put you up at my place tonight,” he said.

“I aint afraid where I am,” Terry said.

“Did I say you were?” Father Barry said. “I thought I’d go over your testimony with you. You can really slam ’em with your stuff on the Doyle and the Nolan jobs. And what they did to Charley.”

He took Terry by the arm and started to walk through the sleet toward the rectory.

Nineteen

FROM THE Court House, where the waterfront hearings were conducted by the Crime Commission, the years and decades and generations of corruptive filth, of criminal sludge, of

collusive mire were being dredged up and poured out over the city. The headlines were thick and black. Radio and television commentators conjured the specter of New York harbor as a contaminated giant. National magazines, awakened at last, threw open their pages to the inhumanity of the shape-up, the waterfront distortion of trade unionism and the shameless complicity of the shipping executives and tainted city officials. The lid was off the waterfront and the sewage was spilling out at last.

As if the warning to stay away from the waterfront unless on pastoral duties had been a preliminary danger-signal, now there followed a last-minute order from the Bishop to Father Donoghue forbidding Father Barry to take the stand at the hearings. But the curate was too elated at the way things were going to feel discouraged. At least, if he wasn't there, he had the satisfaction of knowing that some of the harbor workers who had consulted him were in there taking the oath to lay the facts on the line. Not that he had gone by any rule-of-thumb conviction that they should testify.

A bandy-legged member of the watchmen's union, affiliated with and in fact dominated by the longshoremen bosses, told Father Barry he had been subpoenaed because of the high percentage of pilferage on the pier he was supposed to watch. It happened to be a Johnny Friendly pier. "My first week on the job I was so green I saw some stealin' of ladies' gloves, whole cases of 'em, and so I reported them to the police. Next day this fella Truck comes up to me, asks me if my name is Michael McNally, and when I says 'yes' he hauls off and cracks me nose. 'From now on, mind your own business,' he says to me. 'I thought watchin' is a watchman's business,' I told him. 'You just watch yourself,' he says to me. 'That's all the goddamn watchin' you have t' do.' "

Now McNally's problem was: should he tell that story? It meant the end of his job, and at his time of life there weren't too many jobs a man can do. Father Barry hadn't urged him to testify, preferring to let this old man make up his mind for himself. The troubled watchman had come back the following day



to say that he and his wife had talked it over and decided that he had to testify. "Our faith is supposed to teach us a right and a wrong," he said.

Port Watchman Michael McNally was the first witness called, and when, after describing his violent initiation to the job, he said: "If I knew at that time what I know now, I never would've bothered to try 'n save those boxes of gloves," the honesty of his admission was so startling that a laugh of recognition ran through the audience. The truth has a lovely ring, like a ship's brass bell, Father Barry thought to himself as he heard a playback of McNally's testimony over the radio at lunchtime.

Witness after witness—some of them lowly "insoigents" hoping for a change, some reluctant fence-sitters forced to describe overt acts of violence, some defensively respectable, some openly hostile—recited almost casually their tales of bribery, thievery, intimidation and murder. The crimes of extortion and criminal exploitation were proved not once or twice, but monotonously, day in and day out, through hundreds of hours and thousands of pages of damning testimony.

And the show had hardly begun! Not one, but eight waterfront local treasurers in a row all maintained with various degrees of indignation that their financial records had mysteriously disappeared on the eve of the investigation.

"Strange," said the Chief Counsel, "that there should be this rash of robberies and that the only property stolen in a dozen different parts of the city should be financial records."

An air of expectancy ran through the crowded court room the day that International president-for-life, Willie Givens, took the stand. Once upon a time he had worked side by side with Runty Nolan and Pop Doyle for thirty cents an hour, and he was no smarter than they were or braver or better at his work. But he had something that was still paying off big in America. Call it cupidity or a gift for the main chance, the art of doing nothing in particular and doing it very well, doing it with a torrent of official-sounding words and a fix in here and a cut back there, doing it with a nod to the Mayor, doing it with a wink from the

shippers, doing it with his big red hands making seemingly heart-felt gestures, ready to cry for his forty thousand longshoremen to whom his life was devoted, working day and night for them with no thought except for their welfare, their economic advancement, their social security.

Q. "Now, Mr. Givens, isn't it a fact that five of the seven organizers you appointed in the past ten years had serious criminal records?"

A. "Nobody asked me to check back on their records."

Q. "But as an International labor leader, you would not wish to appoint known criminals to organize your workmen, would you?"

A. "I appointed men who had the confidence of their fellow members. I appointed the best men available."

Q. "When you appointed Mr. McGhee an organizer at ten thousand a year and expenses, were you aware of the fact that he had served two terms in Sing Sing and had fourteen arrests, including twice for murder?"

A. "I'm not sure I knew that at the time."

Q. "But when it was pointed out to you by members of the local to which you yourself belonged, did you take any action to remove Mr. McGhee?"

A. "I can't take any action without the recommendation of my Executive Board."

Q. "Well, did your Executive Board ever take any action?"

A. "Yes, sir. They appointed a sub-committee to investigate the conduct of Brother McGhee."

Q. "I see. And did this sub-committee come to any conclusion?"

A. "I'm not sure. I don't think they made their report yet."

Q. "Now, Mr. Givens, who was chairman of this sub-committee?"

A. "Oh, I think it was Charley Malloy."

Q. "Isn't he the same Charles Malloy who was found murdered in an alley in Bohegan recently?"

A. "I imagine that would be the same man."

Q. "Now, Mr. Givens, when you appointed Mr. Malloy to head a committee to look into the fitness of Slicker McGhee as a union organizer, didn't you realize that Mr. Malloy was the business agent for the Bohegan local headed by John Friendly, who is waiting to be called as a witness here and whose police record shows convictions for bootlegging, for grand larceny and for criminal assault? And to whom stevedore and shipping-company executives have testified in this court room that they have given him over the past five years bribes exceeding fifty thousand dollars?"

Old Willie Givens asked for a glass of water. His putty nose seemed to go a shade bluer. Pop Doyle and Jimmy Sharkey were in the audience, having arrived at the Court House door two hours early to be sure to get in. Well, there was a little justice left in this sin-soaked world, they chuckled to each other as they listened to Willie ramble through one of his characteristically circuitous explanations.

A. "You see, as regarding John Friendly or anybody else, we have in our organization what is known as local autonomy, and before I could take any action regarding any individual, I could only suggest to the Executive Committee that they appoint a sub-committee to examine all the evidence of anything detrimental to our organization or to the industry as a whole, and inasmuch as I . . ."

Q. "Yes, yes, now I quite understand that, Mr. Givens, but what I am asking you directly is whether you knew that Mr. McGhee and Mr. Benasio and Mr. Danny Dondero and Mr. John Friendly, all ranking officers in your organization, were known and habitual and dangerous criminals who merely use the longshoremen's union as a screen for their continuing criminal activities? Now after your forty years as an officer of this organization, can't you honestly answer that question 'Yes' or 'No'?"

A. "There may be a little crime on this waterfront, but I don't see how it's any worse than any other waterfront or any other section of society for that matter, and if anybody's breaking the

law down here, then it's not my job to clean it up, but a job for the police and the district attorneys."

Q. "And you think they have been doing a good job?"

A. "I think it's been pretty well taken care of."

That's about the way it went with Willie Givens. Only there was a whole day of it. If one-third to a half of all the longshore officials had criminal records, he was certainly surprised to hear it. But Willie's jowls hung lowest when he was forced to admit that he had reached a sticky hand into his union's own emergency fund for such items as:

Q. "\$1,450 for golf-club dues?"

A. "Well, I . . ."

Q. "\$11,575 for two Cadillacs?"

A. "Mmmm, that . . ."

Q. "\$850 for a Caribbean cruise?"

A. "I—uh . . ."

By the time Willie stepped down from the stand the mighty president-for-life seemed to have come not only to the end of the day, but perhaps to the end of the road, and Pop and Jimmy and Moose only wished that Runty could be with them to enjoy the wake. As the headlines proclaimed next morning, there was mud in Willie Givens' eyes, more mud than even Runty could have hoped for.

There had been rumors that Big Tom McGovern, at the top of this pinnacle—or dungheap, as some were beginning to call it—would manage to escape a subpoena, but Mr. Big—as the newspapers preferred to call him—finally had his day in court.

Tom McGovern and Willie had been young, ambitious rough-necks together, but they were a different breed of men. McGovern was paunchy and meat-faced too, but there was a power in him that was lacking in Windbag Willie.

He listened patiently while his various waterfront enterprises were read off: He was the president of the Interstate Stevedore Company, the largest firm in the harbor, operating with a dozen different lines at fourteen piers from Bohegan to Red Hook.

BUDD SCHULBERG

He owned half a dozen tug-boat and lighter companies. He owned the oil company that sold the harbor cities all the oil the local administrations consumed. His sand-and-gravel company had nearly all the city contracts. He owned the National Trucking Company, one of the largest in the harbor. He owned a dry-dock, a paint company, a wholesale fruit company.

Q. "Mr. McGovern, an inspector of the books of your Interstate Stevedore Company shows a withdrawal of over one million dollars in the last four years, without any vouchers covering this amount. How would you explain that?"

A. "I don't."

Q. "You're not even willing to guess."

A. "It's not my business to guess."

Q. "As one of our leading businessmen, wouldn't you say it was odd procedure to withdraw an amount of such magnitude without any vouchers to cover it?"

A. "I don't know. We do a lot of entertaining in our business."

Q. "But these sums were not applied to entertainment."

A. "I wouldn't know."

Q. "The hiring bosses and boss loaders on every one of the Interstate Stevedore Company's piers has a criminal record. Could there be any connection between the pay-offs to these men and the unexplained withdrawal of one million dollars?"

A. "I wouldn't know."

Q. "As president of Interstate, don't you follow the affairs of your company?"

A. "Not that closely. It's only one of many enterprises in which I'm interested."

Evidence was then introduced to show that one hundred and fifty convicted criminals were carried on the Interstate payroll.

Q. "Mr. McGovern, four years ago you were chairman of the Mayor's Port Committee to report on conditions in the harbor. Your general conclusion was that conditions were satisfactory. Is that true?"

A. "Yes, sir."

Q. "Did you investigate the fact that your own loading operation was gangster-ridden?"

A. "No, sir."

Tom McGovern had come up a hard road and he gave hard answers, his *Yes, sirs* and *No, sirs* chopping like ax-strokes into the scaffold the Chief Counsel was trying to erect for him.

When it was all over, no one in the court room had any illusions about Big Tom McGovern. He had been chipped away a little, but he was still Mr. Big. He surveyed the room with a final, ironic, go-to-hell expression and stepped down. Outside his uniformed chauffeur and his Lincoln town car were waiting to rush him home to the penthouse overlooking Central Park, forty years and fifty million dollars away from River Street.

The morning Johnny Friendly was to testify, Terry Malloy came down the aisle with a police guard and was seated in the row in back of him. Terry had been under police protection since the night he had spent with Father Barry in the rectory. He had protested that he didn't want a police guard, but Commissioner Donnelly was taking no chances. He and Mayor Burke were feeling shakier every day, and if anything should happen to Terry now, it would only dig their political graves deeper.

Johnny Friendly was a cold, proud, hostile witness, glaring at the row of Commissioners and the counsel staff. Big Tom McGovern, Mr. Upstairs, had pointedly ignored him when they had passed each other in the lobby outside the hearing room. But the Big Guy had shown them how to do it, tell 'em nothing, admit nothing, deny everything.

Q. "Mr. Friendly, has your local ever kept a bank account?"

A. "No, sir."

Q. "Why not?"

A. "That was up to Mr. Malloy, our business agent."

Q. "You don't know why Mr. Malloy never deposited the union funds in a bank?"

A. "I don't know what he done."

Q. "As president, weren't you interested?"

A. "I don't think we had enough money to put in the bank."

Q. "Mr. McGown has testified that it was coming in at the rate of at least six thousand dollars a month, hasn't he?"

A. "I wasn't in this room when he testified."

Q. "But surely you know how much your own union takes in?"

A. "I don't pay much attention to them details."

Q. "Well, what do you do as president?"

A. "Run back and forth, see that the men do their jobs, keep an eye on the shape-up, handle the meetings, and things like that."

Q. "Well, you haven't had a membership meeting in over five years, have you?"

A. "Yeah, I think we had a few."

Q. "Isn't it a fact that one of the changes the late Mr. Joseph Doyle was campaigning for was regular meetings where the members would be allowed to express themselves? And isn't it a fact that this is one of the reasons why you had young Mr. Doyle put to death?"

Johnny glanced around until he located Terry in the audience and fixed him with a baleful look. Terry pressed his lips together and stared back at him.

A. "I don't know nothin' about them killin's."

Q. "I have only asked you about one, so far."

A. "Well, you can save yourself some time because I don't know about any murders."

Q. "Do you realize that you are testifying under oath?"

Hang on, look 'em in the eye and bull it through was Johnny Friendly's witness-chair conduct, and as he was excused from the stand, he was heard to mutter, "You bunch o' sons a . . ."

The next witness called was Terry Malloy. He and Johnny passed each other in the aisle. Johnny opened his mouth in a sneer and Terry just looked at him coldly. Inside he felt a nervous quiver. How had he gotten here? It seemed only the other day that he and Johnny and Charley were watching a television fight together in back of Friendly's and having a few laughs.

"Mr. Malloy," the clerk was saying, "do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth, so help you God?"

"Yeah—right."

"I do," the clerk corrected.

"I do," Terry grunted.

The Counsel led Terry through a series of sullen answers concerning his own activities on the docks and then dropped the sixty-four-dollar question.

"Mr. Malloy, is it true that on the night Joey Doyle was found dead that you were the last one to see him before he was pushed or fell off the roof?"

A. "Brother, he was pushed!"

Q. "Yes, we'll come to that in a moment, but you were the last one to see him?"

A. "Yeah—I mean—yes, you're right."

Q. "And is it true that you went . . ."

A. "Wait a minute, wait a minute, I mean I was the last one to see him except for the guys who pushed him off."

Q. "And you were acquainted with those gentlemen?"

A. "You mean that pair o' bums called Sonny and Specs."

Q. "Do you refer to Richard C. Flavin?"

A. "That's Specs."

Q. "And Jackson H. Rodell?"

A. "Yeah, that's Sonny."

The Chairman of the Commission interrupted. "Have Flavin and Rodell responded to their subpoenas?"

The Chief Counsel: "No, sir. They are said to be out of the State at the present time and beyond our jurisdiction."

The answers came easier as Terry felt the sharp recoil of how they had suckered him into the murder of Joey. The truth, the raw, ugly, purging truth poured out of Terry, unrehearsed, unexpurgated, uninhibited, his own sins merging with the velvet-glove racketeering of his brother Charley and the ruthless reign of terror that in the name of Johnny Friendly had made the docks of Bohegan a one-man show—and a slaughter house.

The Chief Counsel stepped forward. "Mr. Malloy, you may

stand down now. I want to thank you for your forthright statements. I might say they offer something of a contrast to some others this afternoon."

Terry stepped down, excited. Talking about Charley and that last cab ride and how he knew it must have been Danny Dondero who took him out as a substitute for himself, these violent impressions fired off inside him like hot powder flashes, and he was half dazed and trembling with it when he felt rough hands grab him and shake him. It was Johnny Friendly struggling away from a Commission guard to shriek-spit into Terry's unready face:

"You stinkin', rotten cheese-eater. You just dug your own grave. Go fall in it. You're dead on this waterfront and every waterfront from Boston to New Orleans. You don't drive a truck, you don't push a baggage rack, you don't even live. You're a walking dead man."

As the Commission gavel pounded and the guards wrestled Johnny Friendly away, he spat into Terry's face. Terry started his right hand, but someone grabbed it and he was pinned from behind and pulled away. There was a swirl of faces and camera flashes and reporters full of questions.

Twenty

STILL MUMBLING about Johnny Friendly, Terry was hustled into a delivery elevator and led out a back entrance by two uniformed cops who had been assigned to guard him. He had hated cops all his life and the sight of them was no more welcome to him now than it was before.

They drove him to his tenement in their police car. He didn't say anything, and they didn't either.

When Terry got out of the car he started to slam the door behind him, but the cops followed him out.

"What's the story?" Terry said, wanting to walk away from them.

"We're detailed to stay with you," said Patrolman Novick.

"Orders, kid. You're hot. You ought to be glad we're with you."

"Aaaah," Terry snarled at them. "You'll drive me nuts hangin' on my tail like this. How c'n I shake you guys?"

"We've got to park outside your door tonight," Thompson, the other patrolman said. "Tomorrow, if you still feel the same way, we'll take you down to Headquarters and you can sign a release."

Terry spent the rest of that day and most of the next morning in his room. Nobody called him or came to see him and it gave him a creepy feeling, as if he was sealed in a tomb.

By noon next day he was too restless to imprison himself any longer. So he went down to Headquarters with Novick and Thompson and signed some kind of paper, blowing them off.

Just the same it felt funny-peculiar, walking down the street alone. He felt exposed. The *Bohegan Graphic* carried his picture that day with a subtle caption: *Marked for Mob Vengeance?* It was queer seeing it in print like that.

He dropped into a bar he had never patronized, a few blocks in from the waterfront, and had a few beers. He felt people staring at him. He felt alone. A couple of customers walked out. Maybe they were ready to anyway. But Terry imagined that they wanted to get out of gun range in case that crap in the *Graphic* turned out to be true. He thought of his pigeons up on the roof. That was it. He'd go up to them.

He felt a little better when he stepped out on the roof. Then he saw Billy at the far end of it, near his coop. "Hiya, champ?" He tried to put some of the old ginger into his voice. "How's the kid?"

Billy didn't answer. Billy just stared at him. There were tears of bitter rage in his eyes.

"A pigeon for a pigeon!" The boy's terrible contempt was hurled across the roof at Terry, and with it an object that struck

him and fell at his feet. Then Billy was hurrying down the ladder to the fire-escape. But Terry was conscious only of the dead bird in his hand—Swiftly—his lead bird, his favorite. Swiftly, the strongest, the fastest, the best goddamn bird in the neighborhood. Feeling sick, Terry walked slowly over to his coop.

"Oh, Christ!" he moaned when he saw what had been done.

Every single pigeon of Terry's flock lay dead. Every single bird had been wrung by the neck. They lay in a sickening pile where they had been tossed on the floor of the coop.

Terry sank down in the doorway of his coop and put his face into his hands and cried. When he had cried last, he had no idea. Not since he was seven, that's for sure.

How long had he been sitting there? It could have been half an hour. He looked up and Katie was coming toward him. He didn't bother to greet her.

"I've been wanting to see you," she said.

"Yeah. Well, you took your time."

"Pop wouldn't let me come near you. He said it was dangerous. I'm going back to Marygrove tomorrow."

"That's a good idea," Terry said.

"But I had to tell you that what you did . . ."

"Aah, forget it," he cut in. "It's done."

It was only then that she looked behind him into the coop and saw the pigeons. "Oh, my God!" she said. "Oh, no, oh, no . . ."

"Every goddamn one of them," he said. "Every one. I guess that's the kids' idea of showin' me what they think of stool pigeons. I guess that's it."

"Terry, you've got to get away from here now," she said. "Maybe on a ship or out West, a farm . . ."

"Farm!" he said with disgust.

"Well, I don't care, anywhere, as long as it's away from here, from Johnny Friendly, from the whole horrible . . ."

"Look," he said. "Save your breath. There's an old sayin' on the waterfront. If they're goin' to get you, they're goin' to get you. They'll follow you out West. They've gotten guys in Sing Sing. I even heard of them catchin' up with a fella in Australia."

Katie pressed her fist hard against her lip so as not to cry.

"Anyway don't worry about me," he said. "You'll go back to school. Get to be a teacher and try to pound some sense into a lot of snotnose kids. Maybe meet a man teacher, so the two of you c'n starve to death an' live happily ever after . . ."

He tried to laugh at her trying not to cry.

"Now you better beat it," he said. "Your old man's right. I know how to duck. But you want to get back to that daisyland of yours lookin' as good as when you come down."

"I'll pray for you," she said. "I won't forget you."

"That goes for me double," he said.

She turned and walked back across the roof. She had the most graceful way of walking of any person he had ever known, that lovely kid with her head in the clouds. And he never kissed her, never even so much as touched her, except that minute and a half when they found themselves dancing. Boy, that was some minute and a half.

He watched the last bit of her long, streaked-brown hair disappearing into the stairwell three roofs beyond. The pile-driver on the waterfront was still banging away but Terry was oblivious to the pounding. He stood there thinking about her.

Father Barry went to see Terry a few days later and didn't find him in his room. He returned the following evening and Terry still was not there. He left a note on the door for Terry to phone him, and when no call came through, the priest reported the facts to the police. They did not seem too concerned. They suggested that a loner like Terry might have shipped out or hitch-hiked West. However, if he failed to return to his rooms within a week, they would list him as missing.

Three weeks later the remains of a human being were found in a barrel of lime that had been tossed on one of the multi-acre junk heaps in the Jersey swamps. The coroner's report after the inquest attributed death to twenty-seven stab wounds, apparently inflicted by an ice pick. No next of kin came forward. The lime-mutilated corpse was never identified. But the boys along River Street, pro mob and anti, knew they had seen the last of a pretty tough kid.

Twenty-one

FATHER BARRY looked around at the monastic room that had been living quarters, office and a place of worship these past two years. He wondered what was being decided at the conference between his Pastor and the Bishop. Father Donoghue had been called up to the Bishop's residence that afternoon, and it was rectory scuttlebutt that Pete Barry was marked for a transfer.

Father Barry gathered up some of the waterfront mail that was strewn around and bound it together with a thick rubber band. He was going to sit down and answer every one of those letters at length, wherever he was. "The Power House"—as he and his fellow curates referred to the chancellery—had the authority to remove his body to Leonardo—or Timbuctoo—and he was ready to follow obediently if not resignedly. But they couldn't cut off his lines of communication—of identification with the hard-pressed dock wallopers of Bohegan.

Half an hour later the Pastor called him down to the office.

"Pete, I had a good, long talk with the Bishop," Father Donoghue said quietly. "The Bishop has agreed to hold up the transfer for the time being. I must say he heard me out when I tried to point out the positive things you've been doing. But he does want you to, well, stay out of the limelight, no more interviews and sensational broadsides and that sort of thing."

"Father, I sure appreciate this. You've been a hundred per cent. That's more than I can say for somebody else around here."

"I hope your feeling about the Monsignor won't leave you bitter or sour. We're not infallible. We're men. All kinds of men. Wherever there are honors, positions of authority and power, you are going to find men jockeying for them, men who are

supposed to be above such things, and I'm afraid they will until the day that Christ comes for all of us."

"I wonder if I can wait that long."

"That may be one of your shortcomings," Father Donoghue said gently. "But I think you made an important contribution in putting our faith into action on a front that can make religion a real force in the lives of our parishioners. You're right, of course. Christ *is* in the shape-up and knows what it feels like to be left out in the cold or to be crucified for speaking up. I was very much interested in your leaflet. And I think we should continue the basement meetings. I understand there's a group of at least a hundred who want to keep them going now. But Pete, you did make certain mistakes. Not briefing me so I could brief the Bishop. You let your opponents get the jump on you. It is true that you obeyed the order to remain away from the courtroom, physically. But you did present in writing a detailed plan of rehabilitation for the harbor which received a great deal of publicity. In it you said exactly what you would have said if you had taken the stand. That doesn't mean I wasn't impressed with the plan. I like your ideas for a control commission to screen out the criminal types, and for supervised, honest elections and regular, open meetings for the union locals, a rotation plan for the hiring, to get rid of the shape-up, a credit-union system to run off the loan sharks, and protection for the older workers, seniority, I think you call it, and a welfare fund. You see, Pete, I have read it pretty closely. I thought it was really excellent and I'm convinced our Catholic longshoremen should be encouraged to work along these lines. But Pete, again, the way you went about it was too far and too fast."

"But Father, I had to move fast. The clock was running out."

"Pete, if you had only cleared your plan with me I might have been able to buck it up to the Bishop and I think I could have talked it through. Instead he was hit cold with all those headlines about the 'waterfront priest.' "

"I guess I did set myself up for a sucker punch," Father Barry said. "Well, it was a gamble, and in a way I lost. But, Father, if

anything ever does come out of this waterfront mess, at least I'll have the satisfaction of knowing the stuff we believe in is getting across to some of our boys here in the harbor."

"Son, you're going to have lots of satisfaction. And lots of heartache. You've got a strong sense of justice and a strong conscience. That's good, as long as you don't defy authority. If it makes you feel any better," Father Donoghue said, "I happen to know the Bishop is planning to have a long talk with the Monsignor. He thinks O'Hare has overstepped his bounds the other way in condoning waterfront evils. So don't think too harshly of our Bishop. He may think you're a little too chesty and want to cool you off a little bit. But he's very much interested in the idea that we may be allowing our waterfront communicants to stray from the Church because we're not taking a firm enough moral position in defense of their God-given rights. Believe me, Pete, you've stirred up some embers here that we're going to keep burning. I want you to fan those embers, if at the same time you learn how to control the fire all round you—and in you."

Rising, the Pastor put his arms out to Father Barry and embraced him. "I see it's time for me to work on my sermon for High Mass on Sunday. God be with you, Pete."

"God bless you, Father."

Back in his room, Father Barry fingered the rosary given to him by the girl he used to go steady with in high school, and about whom he wondered now and then. She reminded him just a little bit of Katie Doyle. Katie had been in to see him before she left for Marygrove. She had changed; she was older; there was less of the onward-Christian-soldier, I-want-it-to-be-just-as-it-is-in-the-Missal. She had embarrassed him by apologizing for expecting him to solve everything overnight. Now she had had a taste of the complexities, a bitter taste. Now she knew that the sins of avarice and theft and murder in Bohegan were not to be shucked off like a snake's skin, but had infected the body, deeply.

"Katie, I hope you never lower the fine flame of your indignation," he had told her. "Even when you learn as you have learned that it's going to burn you a little bit too."

They had looked at each other a moment, and he had known that both of them were thinking of Terry and the way evil often intertwined itself with good, and the way life had of rubbing some of the quality of one onto the other.

It still hurt him to realize that Runtz Nolan and Terry Malloy actually had been torn from this world and hurled into the next. Day after day he had tortured himself with the question of their sacrifice. Had human life been given in vain, and had he been worthy to ask this terrible price of them? I took their lives in my hands, he prayed. I stumbled upon these two most unlikely of martyrs, an old, tough-flint of a bar-fly and a fringe hoodlum. I took these two, and, right or wrong, I made them dare as St. Ignatius dared when he chose the Coliseum, saying: "I am God's wheat: I am ground by the teeth of the wild beasts that I may end as the pure bread of Christ."

From his desk Father Barry picked up the preliminary report just issued by the Crime Commission and flipped a page: "Criminals whose records belie any suggestion that they can be reformed have monopolized controlling positions in the long-shoremen's union; under their regime narcotics traffic, loan-sharking, short-ganging, payroll phantoms, shake-down and extortion in all forms—and the brutal ultimate of murder—now flourish and continue unchecked."

Continue unchecked. In Father Barry's mind those words ticked on: *Continue unchecked.* Tom McGovern was untouched. Everybody knew his word still thundered on the docks.

Had the mountain strained to bring forth a mouse? Willie Givens was under indictment for misappropriation of union funds. He had been retired on half his salary, and the new president was Matt Bailey who for years had been president of the checkers' union that worked jowl by jowl with Willie. And, of course, for Tom McGovern. That reform was the laugh of the waterfront.

In Bohegan, it was true, the hearings had shaken up City Hall, and Mayor Burke had just announced that he would not stand for re-election. That meant the end of Donnelly too. There was talk of a new reform ticket. Interstate had been fined five thou-

sand dollars for commercial bribery and had lost its license to operate on the docks. But it had quickly rebounded as the National Stevedore Company. An Interstate vice-president had resigned and a pier superintendent had been given a six months' sentence, suspended.

But to Father Barry the most mystifying fact of all was that Johnny Friendly had been tried merely for perjury and given a year in the State Prison. He'd be back in seven or eight months, Moose and Pop had told the priest. Meanwhile everybody in Bohegan was in on the secret that he'd go right on running his docks from inside the pen.

The national labor federation had expelled the longshoremen's union as "hopelessly gangridden," but the Johnny Friendlys with the tacit support of Tom McGovern and the shipping association, hung on to those docks. Longshoremen like Moose and Pop and Jimmy and Luke, in nearly every part of the harbor, were trying to buck them. But they were still on the outside looking in.

Restlessly, Father Barry went down into the church to meditate, to examine his own conscience, since he was finding so much fault with others', and to ask for guidance. The small church was empty, but in the flickering, shadowed light of the altar and the shrine candles it seemed very large, and Pete Barry, on his knees in front of his favorite Saint Xaxier, seemed very small. He prayed for his friends, and he prayed for his enemies, and he prayed for the dead, and he prayed for surcease from the stalking evil of Bohegan.

Solaced, he made the sign of the Cross, rose and genuflected. Then he walked out of the church and crossed the street into Pulaski Park.

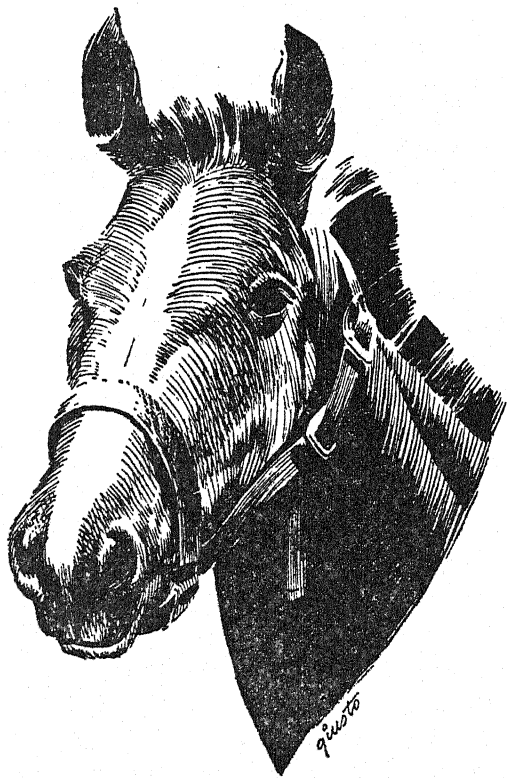
Peering through the grille work at the far end of the park, Father Barry looked out across the waterway of the Hudson to the most powerful harbor city in the history of the world.

Down river a ship sounded its whistle in a melancholy, echoing farewell as it eased down the Narrows. Slowly, Father Barry turned away from the old North River—Johnny Friendly's silent partner still—and walked back to answer some of those letters in the rectory.

Reckless

PRIDE OF THE MARINES

Andrew Geer



AN ABRIDGEMENT

The Author

ANDREW GEER embarked on a colorful career after leaving the University of Minnesota. He was at one time a scout for the Brooklyn Dodgers and he has been a sparring partner for Jack Dempsey. He has lived in Hong Kong, Cairo, Damascus and Canada, and is the author of *Mercy in Hell*, *The Sea Chase*, and *The New Breed*. He commanded the Fifth Regiment of the First Marine Division in Korea, where he first met Reckless.

RECKLESS: Pride of the Marines—Andrew Geer
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THE STORY OF RECKLESS begins with a young Korean boy, Kim Huk Moon, who loved horses. Ever since Kim was eight years old he had wanted to own a horse. Night after night he put himself to sleep dreaming of the horse he would one day own. Kim's dream did not spring on him from the darkness like a tiger from a thicket. It came to him on the day of his grandfather's funeral. Word reached the family in the middle of the night that Grandfather Kim had died, and early the next morning they started out to make the journey across the city of Seoul. Father Kim, silent and sad-faced, led the way, followed by Mother Kim and Nam Soon, and last were Chung Soon and Kim.

At the corner of the five streets, tall, stern Schoolmaster Yu was waiting and he fell in stride with Father Kim. With their backs to the sun and the Han River, they walked through the village. A shrill-voiced old woman, sitting with her back to a cracked mud and wattle hut, cried out at them. Father Kim and Yu bowed and walked on. Then they were free of the buildings and the road lost itself among the hills. It was not long before the hills fell away into the flat lands of the rice paddies and mulberry orchards, and everywhere there was motion with serpentine lines of people and horse carts, workers in the paddy fields and orchards and the morning wind in the young rice. In a half mile, they came to the streetcar line. Kim sat beside the tram window while Chung Soon pointed out the sights. There was the Kyongsong Athletic Field with Japanese boys in white uniforms at play, and closer to the tracks there was a Buddhist temple.

The city grew heavy with buildings and thick with people. There was a halt, a wait, and then an imperious Japanese policeman with white sleeves waved them on. Shortly after, the car passed through West Gate and came to the end of the line where friends were waiting. The party walked toward the prison. The

guards shouted at them, but after a time the body of Grandfather Kim was released and the procession moved back through the West Gate, past the police station on the corner and into the churchyard. Ever after that, death to Kim meant the burning of incense and the Buddhist priest chanting the Sutras and the fluttering of the prayer wheel in the wind.

When Father Kim led his family onto the city streets to catch a streetcar back to the village, the day was now hot and the streets crowded. In the confusion they boarded the wrong tram. It took a long time to work his way through the crowd to speak to the conductor while the car sped them farther and farther out of their way. Father Kim began shouting and shoving his way through the pack. In the midst of all this, sparks flew from the metal box near the motorman and the car screeched to a halt.

The motorman looked into the box and shrugged and the conductor seemed to hold Father Kim responsible for the power failure and ordered him off. A Japanese official arrived and was angry with everyone. When Father Kim was pointed out as the troublemaker, the Japanese beat him over the shoulders with a cane. All Koreans were ordered to leave the area.

Because it was so hot, they sought the shade of the nearby grandstand of the Seoul race track. For the first time in his life Kim saw a race horse. He forgot the heat and his thirst as he stared at the horses galloping, their trim feet kicking up small puffballs of dust.

One rider brought his horse close to the outer rail and called for water. The horse was a red sorrel with white stockings and a broad blaze down its nose. Hypnotized, Kim watched the animal.

Kim had to dogtrot to follow the resolute pace set by his angry father on the way home. At last they reached the shabby old mud and wattle hut. It was twin to a hundred others that lay side to side or back to back along the narrow, crooked streets that were red soil thrown over rocks. As the surface eroded, the

rocks protruded like ugly moles and wracked the wheels of the night soil cart.

The Kim house formed an L. The roof was of rice straw, dark with mildew, and the walls were baked mud. Inside the house, beyond the flimsy, sagging door, was a platform of raised flooring which covered two-thirds of one wing. The baked mud stove with its elbow-jointed chimney was surprisingly efficient. Adjoining it was the sleeping kong, also of baked mud, with tunnels underneath in which fires could be built to warm the sleeping surface in winter. The shorter end of the L was without flooring or platform and was used for storage of wood and charcoal and the hanging of meat or fowl or fish, when the Kims were fortunate enough to come by such food. In each arm of the L there was one window opening, without frame or glass. In the winters these openings were covered over with rice straw matting.

Mother Kim guardedly watched her husband as he squatted in the shade smoking his bamboo-stemmed pipe, coughing now and again with a sepulchral sound. He had not spoken since the train official beat him with the cane.

"How long must we wait? How long can we wait?" he asked. She glanced fearfully toward the door as though she expected a Japanese policeman to be standing there listening.

"At each meeting they tell us to wait, that the League of Nations will do for us what we will not do for ourselves. Hah!" His voice grew angry. "While we wait, my father dies in prison. His crime was preaching freedom for the people of this land of Morning Calm. While we wait, our children go without schooling and are scrawny from empty stomachs."

Father Kim sucked on a dying pipe because he had only enough tobacco for an after dinner smoke. "You and I work the fields the daylight hours and for our labors we receive less than enough to buy the rice to feed us and cotton cloth to cover our bodies. Today's tram ride cost us one yen twenty sen. I must work three days from dawn to dark for that amount, and with rice seventy sen a kilo, we have but enough for life. How long

can we wait?" he repeated hopelessly. Further protest was smothered in a fit of coughing.

Shortly after they went to bed a wind went whistling through the streets, blowing clouds of dust before it and drawing in its wake a soft, gray rain. Kim heard the rain on the roof and turned its patter into the beat of a horse's hoofs. That night he had his first of ten thousand dreams about a horse that he would some day own. It was just such a horse as he had seen over the rail at the track.

At the first hint of light in the sky to the east, Mother Kim was feeding twigs and small wood into the stove so that just enough fire was made to prepare the morning rice and heat water to drink.

The morning meal consisted of a bowl of rice and many cups of hot water. As the rim of sun came over the hill the mother and father hurried to the fields. Chung Soon was left in charge. While Kim did small chores in the yard the two sisters aired the sleeping pads and cleaned the house and rinsed the rice bowls.

Kim wandered onto the street and his eyes turned in the direction of the race track as though drawn by a magnet. He began to run. From time to time he fell and his knees became scraped and bleeding.

He was nearly exhausted when the high wooden shell of the grandstand came into view. Completely done in, he reached the shadows of the vast structure and crawled into a shallow ditch by the outer rail and, sitting in the cool grass, watched the horses. His lips were stiff and his tongue thick from want of water, but he clung to his post. Many horses came onto the track and finally Kim was rewarded when he saw his dream horse circling toward him.

He was oblivious to a group of well-dressed Japanese men who came to the rail. The flame-colored horse with the white stockings and white ribbon down its face came to the outer rail while the rider talked with the man. If there was a single detail of the animal he had missed the previous day, it was burnt into his memory now.

The rider took the horse away toward the buildings on the far side of the track. Kim was badly frightened when he realized one of the Japanese was speaking to him. The man, taller than the others, was in uniform and his high, leather boots shone in the sun. Kim scrambled to his feet and stood stiffly at attention with his eyes to the ground as his father had taught him. Though Kim listened carefully, it was difficult to understand the man.

"Are you lost?"

Slowly Kim formed his reply, "No, Honored One, I live over there." He pointed.

"What are you doing in a ditch beside the track?"

Kim lifted his eyes for a fleeting moment. "Watching the flame horse with the white legs, Honored One."

"Why that horse?" The voice was not so curt.

"It is the horse I sleep with." Kim had meant to say "dream of." The men laughed and he ducked his head lower in embarrassment.

"Why do you sleep with my horse?" The voice was nearly gentle now.

"It is the number one, Honorable One."

The Japanese was pleased. His gloved hand came from a pocket and between the thumb and forefinger was a yen note. Kim looked into the face of his new friend before he could believe the money was to be his. He took it and bowed stiffly. When he straightened, the man and his group had turned away and were walking toward a long, black automobile waiting near the gate. Kim watched them until they had entered the machine and it moved out of sight.

Stunned by his good fortune, Kim tucked the yen note in the toe of his rubber slipper and began the long walk home. Every now and again he would stop and look into his slipper to see that the yen note was safe. When he reached home, his sisters were waiting anxiously. Nam Soon began to scold, but Chung Soon silenced her.

With reluctance and considerable care, Kim stepped out of his slippers at the door and wondered how he could claim the yen note without being seen. Chung Soon gave him a bowl of

cold rice and while eating he sat where he could watch his slippers. When he was through, he retrieved the money and went into the yard to look for a place to hide his fortune. He could see no place to his liking and the bill began to burn in his sweating palm. He went back inside. Nam Soon had gone to the riverbank to fish for stray bits of firewood and Chung Soon was busy with her chores. She squatted on her hunkers blowing life into the fire and smiled at him over her shoulder.

Kim held out his hand and opened it. She took the damp paper, straightened it and her eyes widened as she worked the creases from it carefully.

"I will put it in a safe place for you."

Kim followed as she hurried into the storeroom wing of the L. From a shelf she took a glass jar the Han River had brought them some days before. Removing the top, she dropped the money into it and then replaced the cover tightly. Together they placed the glass in a hole underneath the mud sill and covered it over.

When their parents entered the house they carried fagot bundles scavenged along the way and were slow-moving and weak from fatigue. The meal of rice and hot water was soon over. Because of their hard work in the fields, the mother and father shared a small portion of pickled fish from the stone crock in the storeroom. Father Kim also had a cup of Japanese tea to salve his tired muscles and ease his cough, which usually started up with the cool, moist air rising from the river. While Mother Kim and the two girls cleaned away after the meal and rolled out the sleeping pads, Father Kim went to the street side of the house and lighted his bamboo-stemmed pipe.

Two hours after the sun settled into the Yellow Sea, the hard-working Korean villagers were abed. The district was an assignment coveted by the Japanese police for there was no trouble and night patrols could go slack. In the station building adjoining the railway house the police could play cards or sleep the night through with ease of mind, for they knew their charges lacked the energy or spirit to foment trouble.

RECKLESS: PRIDE OF THE MARINES

Tired as he was, Kim thought of the horse. Once again he lived through every moment of the day. When he finally slept it was to have a vivid dream of the red sorrel.

CHAPTER II

IN THE MORNING Kim was seized with an irresistible desire to return to the track and his eyes kept seeking the direction toward the high wooden stands. He tried to get excited over a game of kickball with a playmate from across the street, but his attention was so divided that he was beaten many times. He left the game and struck off for the track.

Chung Soon knew he was leaving and her heart was clutched with fear. Where was he going? What did he do? With Nam Soon's grumbling in her ears, she hurried after him.

Kim walked with assurance. Though the day was hot, it did not worry him and it was not long before he saw the grandstand looming in the distance . . . and then he was in its shade and at the track rail. There were many horses circling the oval, but a glance told him his horse was not out yet. He climbed to the top of the wooden rail and with his toes curled about the vertical pole he was secure and happy with the better view.

Chung Soon arrived at the track a few minutes after Kim and, clinging to the shadow of the structure, she gained a view of the track. She saw Kim perched on the railing, hunched over in a comfortable position with elbows on his knees and his chin cupped in his hands. She remembered how strangely affected he had been on the first day . . . she had thought it was fever, but it had been only the sight of the horses. He had been hypnotized by them.

Chung Soon turned and hurried home along the dusty road.

Kim waited patiently and he began to see things that he had missed before. Some of the horses wore cloth wraps around their legs, others ran free of bandages. There were riders who ap-

peared to float on the backs of their mounts like feathers while others jolted along like rocks. Once in a while the scene would become exciting as two riders challenged one another and let their mounts run full out for a short space.

Then his horse came onto the track! Instantly all the others were lost to view as he saw it come through the gate on the far side, and he gripped the pole tightly with his toes to keep from falling.

Following the outside rail, the horse came within a few feet of him and he could smell the sweet grass fragrance and hear the rider soft-talking to it.

The Japanese rider saw the ragged little Korean on the fence and remembered him. When he nodded and spoke politely Kim nearly fell from his perch.

The horse circled the track at a slow pace and then was let out in a gallop. Twice around at this easy pace and then the rider took her to the middle of the track where he pulled his cap down and, crouching lower, let the eager animal out to a fast gallop. Once around at this speed and they left the track through the rear gateway. Kim was bereft at this sudden loss and looked longingly across the track. The temptation was too much.

His pace slowed as he crossed the track and his heart pounded the closer he approached, but his curiosity drove him on. He came to the rear gate and followed a road through the line of stalls until he saw his horse being rubbed vigorously. When the grooms were finished the flame red coat shone like the sun in the early morning. A gnarled old man stood nearby with the rider, watching.

All along the area between the mud-walled stables other horses were being saddled, rubbed or walked. A fiery stallion was brought from a stall. It reared high in the air lifting the man on the lead strap from the ground. Kim wished the rider would not get on this one. While one groom tried to quiet the wild horse, a second cupped his hands and the rider stepped into them and lifted himself easily, fearlessly onto the horse. Once he was in the saddle the stallion quieted somewhat and Kim

breathed again. As the rider turned toward the track he noticed Kim, who braced himself stiffly and bowed formally.

Kim returned to the grandstand and paused in the shade . . . home seemed a long way off at the moment. He noticed a small hole leading into the dark, cavernous section under the seats. With difficulty he squeezed through and when his eyes became accustomed to the darkness, he saw that the ground was littered with a confusion of things thrown down by the people who sat overhead. He began to paw about in this scavenger's delight. There were papers, bottles, age-hardened orange peels, apple cores and, find of finds, many saw ends of wood!

Selecting an area near the small hole where the light was better, he began to sort through the refuse methodically. The bottles, apple cores and orange peels were tossed into a discard pile. The papers were flattened and put one on the other and the pieces of wood went next to the paper. He came upon an eight-foot length of stout cord and his breath sucked in gustily at the sight of it.

He had worked his way through a forty foot square when his fingers touched a metal disc. He rushed with it to the light. It was a fifty sen piece! He slipped it into his rubber slipper, panting a little from his good fortune. He looked into the deep cavern . . . each day he would sort through a section and carry paper and wood home, but any money he found would go into the jar and one day he would have enough to buy a horse.

Wrapping the wood in the paper, he formed a large bundle and secured it with the cord which was long enough to make knapsack loops for his shoulders. He was dismayed to find he would have to walk nearly bent double to support it. Grimly he started out.

The sun was hot and soon he was sweating until it ran into his eyes, partially blinding him. Every time he stumbled the bundle was thrown from right or left and he would have to lunge in the direction of the load to regain the point of balance. When he had gone as far as his legs would carry him, he staggered to a halt. The load overcoming him, he was pulled backwards and

lay in the dusty road propped against the bundle. After a time he had the strength to slip his pinched shoulders from the cord and was embarrassed to see a knot of people gathering about him.

An elder asked, "Are you hurt, Small One?"

Kim scrambled to his feet and bowed, "The load is heavy. I am resting."

The old man nodded. "Do not lift your guts out. There is enough pain in life without that." He bowed and went on, followed by the curious. One avaricious-looking man remained nearby while Kim sat on the wood watching the fellow covertly. There were deep purple tatoo marks on his arms, neck and chin.

The man spoke, "May I help you with your heavy load?"

The words were Korean, but the voice was not: neither was it Japanese. Kim well knew what such an offer meant . . . half the load at the end! He slid off the bundle until his buttocks rested on the road and began to fit his aching shoulders into the cord loops. As he strained back in an arch, the coin rolled from his rubber slipper and lay in the dust. Kim gasped and his hand darted out to grasp the coin and a handful of dust with it.

The man moved closer. His tongue ran over his blue lips. "That is much money for a young one to have. Where did you steal it? And the wood?" He leaned over until his face was but a foot from Kim's. "Give me the coin before I break your arm."

"Go away!" Kim shrieked. Startled, the man jumped back. Kim squirmed from his bindings, sprang to his feet and began to run on terror-driven legs. He cried out when he saw a number of people moving toward him along the road. His terror evaporated when Chung Soon broke from the crowd and came flying toward him with several neighbor men at her winged heels. Kim was surprised when Chung Soon and the men rushed right on by him and for the first time he realized his pursuer was not breathing down his neck. The tattooed man had picked up the bundle, but when he saw the wrathful vanguard descending, he dropped the wood and took off across the bordering rice paddy. No one followed.

RECKLESS: PRIDE OF THE MARINES

Kim was so weak and shaky he had to sit down. Chung Soon placed the wood beside him and squatted so she could look into his face.

"Are you hurt, Little One?"

Kim shook his head, but did not look at her or try to speak.

"Why do you go to the place where the horses run?"

Without replying Kim got to his feet and began to trudge down the road toward the village while Chung Soon took up the bundle and followed after.

They arrived in the triangle of yard, breathless. Nam Soon was inclined to scold, but subsided at the sight of the wood and paper. As she began to build the small fire against the arrival of their parents, Chung Soon and Kim unwrapped the bundle in the storage room. The wood was stacked and the papers carefully folded to be looked at by Father Kim.

Chung Soon then considered Kim soberly. "What will we tell our father? He will ask about the paper, he will want to know."

Kim worried over the questions, but found no answer. He shook his head. Chung Soon said, "It fell from the train and rolled into the ditch?"

Kim nodded and held out the coin. Chung Soon's hand darted out and took it. She examined it closely and bit into it. She looked over her shoulder to see where Nam Soon was before she handed it back.

"Put it with the other," she whispered.

Mother and Father Kim arrived from the fields. As usual, they were exhausted to the point of collapse. Their hand bath from the earthenware bowls in the yard refreshed them somewhat. As Father Kim got into dry clothing he saw the wood and papers and was pleased with such a windfall and patted Chung Soon on the shoulder.

While the evening meal was being prepared, he sat in the cooling breeze coming off the river and studied the papers carefully.

He called Kim to him. "All men should know how to read and write."

Kim bowed. "Yes, Honored Father."

"Would you be awake and seize on each figure as you would a piece of fish if I make arrangements with the Honorable Yu Jik Soo?"

Kim lowered his eyes to hide his panic. If he went to reading and writing, he could not go to the track. He asked shyly, "Why don't you teach me?"

His father coughed. "I know but a few characters, not enough to be of use." Father Kim lowered his voice, "I am the first in my family to be without this knowledge. It is the same with all since the Japanese came to our Land of Chosen. I will go to see Yu Jik Soo tonight."

Kim was in such a panic it was an effort to swallow his rice. After the sparse meal his father filled the long-stemmed pipe and left while Kim squatted against the wall of the hut and waited.

It was dark when Kim saw his father returning. From the very way he walked, the boy knew the arrangements for school had been made. He wanted to cry out and run into the darkness before he heard the bad news. His father stood before him, gaunt and thin.

"It has been arranged, my son. You will go to the classes of Yu Jik Soo."

Kim shivered. "Yes, Father."

"The hours for your class will be from three o'clock in the afternoon until five."

Kim's heart bounded and he smiled happily. He could go to the track and still be back in time for the school.

"You will be alert and polite. The Honorable Yu is a long-time friend of your grandfather. Each seventh day you will take to him a bundle of wood."

"Yes, Father—"

"More important, the police will imprison our friend if they learn he is teaching Korean. You will use the river pathway, you will move as a shadow and always go alone."

"Yes, Father, I understand."

The next morning Kim's eagerness to gain the track made the distance seem long as he ran most of the way. Without pause, he slipped under the rail and crossed the track and was standing near his horse's stall when the rider came from a house nearby. Upon seeing Kim, the rider's eyebrows lifted. He said, "Good morning."

Kim stiffened and bowed, "Good morning, worthy rider of horses."

The two grooms threw open the door and led the plunging stallion from its stall. The horse was nervous, edgy and a constant care to the men holding it. The rider settled like a feather on the horse's back and, picking up the reins, turned the animal toward the track. Kim followed just out of heel range. The ricocheting feet were kicking up puffballs of dust and gravel which the wind carried into Kim's face. He closed his eyes and moved to the right to escape the stinging dirt.

When he opened his eyes the horse was at the gate leading onto the track where the whipping wind flung a sheet of paper about its front legs. The stallion reared and swung about violently. The rider was thrown heavily against the rail and his boot caught in the stirrup. He tried desperately to swing upward and grasp the stirrup strap, but the horse whirled and the horseman struck the corner post with a crash. Then the horse began to lunge and kick at the helpless man swinging from its side. Kim cried out in terror as he charged forward. The horse swung in another horrifying circle and the reins slapped into Kim's hands. He was hurled into the air and struck the railing heavily, but clung on desperately. The frantic, savage animal pirouetted violently and Kim, like a stone in a sling, made a full circle without touching the ground.

There were shouts and the grooms ran to the scene. The horse was subdued by many hands and the old man knelt beside the stunned youth. Unaware of his rescue, Kim lay in the dirt with his hands frozen around the reins. The old trainer had to pry him loose. Others released the rider's foot from the stirrup and the crazed animal was led back to the stable.

The rider got slowly to his feet. He found his crop in the dust and began to slap himself clean with it. When he tried to take a step, the foot that had been locked in the stirrup buckled and muscles in his jaw rippled under the skin. Forcing himself to walk without limping, he went to where Kim sat on the ground and helped the dazed youngster to his feet. His gentle hands wiped the grime from the boy's face and brushed his clothes.

The old trainer said, "Are you all right, Kan?"

Kan, the rider, answered slowly, "Yes, Takeo, old friend, I am not hurt." He took a deep breath and his hand rested on Kim's head. "But for my little friend, my brains would be on every post around this track. We must look to the boy." He took Kim's hand in his and began to walk toward the stables. The boy wavered on uncertain legs and Takeo took his other hand and the three walked together.

Kim had never seen such a house as the two men took him into. There were wooden floors in every room and rich rugs and shining furniture. Takeo clapped his hands and servants came running.

The rider sat on a high cushion and lighted a cigarette. A servant brought a deep basin of hot water to him and he grimaced as he put his injured ankle into it. He spoke in Japanese and Kim was taken to the bathroom where the servant made him sit in a stone tub with steaming hot water to his neck. The man stood nearby and when the water began to cool, it was drained off and the tub refilled with more water near the boiling point. Kim watched his skin turn red and felt his head grow giddy. Finally the servant let him step from the tub and began to rub him so vigorously with a harsh towel Kim expected his skin to roll off his bones. When dry, the servant put salve on the open bruises. He got into his clothes and was directed into the room where Kan and Takeo waited. The rider motioned to a cushion near him while Takeo poured and handed him a cup of tea. It tasted sweet and had the fragrance of flowers. Kan smiled.

"What is your name, my friend?"

"Kim Huk Moon." Though the tea was hot, he gulped it and didn't mind the burn.

"Why do you come so far to the track each day?" Kan lifted his ankle from the water and the servant refilled the basin.

"Because I dream of your red horse with the four white legs."

Takeo refilled Kim's cup. He exchanged glances with Kan and the rider nodded. The old man asked, "Would you like to work with Kan and me and our horses?"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes!" Kim cried and the tea slopped from his cup as he began to tremble with excitement. "I would like nothing more than to lead the red horse as I saw the other boy doing."

Kan touched the top of his head. "You will be more than a lead boy. We will teach you, Takeo and I, and you will be a trainer of horses, a number one trainer."

From his purse he took a ten yen note. "It is your first month's salary as apprentice trainer to Takeo."

Kim returned the money. "I cannot work all the day. I must go to school in the afternoon. Perhaps you would let me work for less."

The two men laughed heartily and the money was forced into Kim's hand. Kan dried his foot and pulled on his boot. He stood and stamped the floor to test the ankle.

"All right, number one trainer and number two trainer, there are horses to make ready for the races, or the Honorable Colonel will be unhappy."

CHAPTER III

EXCEPT FOR THE TWO HOURS he spent each afternoon at school, life became an enchanted dream for Kim. The long walk to and from the track, the longer hours and the excitement of his new life left him drained of energy by the time

he joined the other students to sit before the old scholar. There was no time to prepare his lessons and oftentimes his head nodded in sleep as the peacefulness of the classroom overcame him. Teacher Yu was unhappy with his new student and decided to speak to the father if the boy did not improve.

Each morning, as his father and mother left, Kim would hurry to the track. On arrival at the stables he would enter the house of Takeo and Kan where the servants accepted him as a special one. The old trainer and rider would be up and sipping their morning tea and Kim would breakfast with them. He was introduced to countless new dishes and for the first time in his life there were no hollows in his stomach crying for attention. His stamina improved to the point where he could dogtrot from his home to the track without tiring.

The two Japanese horsemen had taken the boy to their hearts. They bought Kim an outfit of clothes, even to the shiny boots and riding crop and the youngster looked like a miniature Kan when he wore them. Neither of the older men appeared to notice that the boy wore his finery only at the track and always changed into his ragged things before leaving in the afternoon.

When Kan was on the track exercising the horses, Takeo poured into Kim's ear the horse secrets he had learned in a lifetime. With meticulous care the old man drew the skeleton of a horse and each day added a muscle, a tendon or a vital organ, which Kim had to identify and explain its function. Sometimes the boy's brain groaned with the load being put on it, but his appetite to learn about horses was insatiable and he was able to absorb and retain the most meager morsel.

There were other things Kim also learned. Kan and Takeo had arrived from Japan three years previous and were in the employ of the Colonel who commanded a Japanese cavalry regiment. On one occasion Kim was presented to the Colonel and Kan recounted the tale of his courage with the raging stallion. Kim recognized the officer as the man who had given the yen note . . . the beginning of all his good fortune. The Colonel

was a wealthy, sports-loving man who took his military post and duties lightly. Old Takeo had trained horses for the Colonel's father and Kan had been riding for the man since he was old enough to mount a horse.

The time of day Kim loved most was when he took Flame to the walking circle. Then it was that he and the filly were alone. Walk and walk, step and step in the circle with her sweet breath fanning his neck. When his hand rose to her head or neck, she would lean into it and when there was none to hear, he talked to her softly. It was the filly's quick acceptance of the boy that convinced Takeo and Kan he had the touch animals trust. As the two horsemen well knew, a man has such a hand at birth or he does not have it . . . it cannot be learned or otherwise acquired. Though he knew her name was Yuen, a Japanese word for happiness or merriment, he called her Ah-Chim-Hai and she came to respond to it. When the two men learned of the boy's name for the filly, they too began to call her by Kim's name, though they later shortened it to Flame.

Chung Soon was the only one in the family or the village who knew Kim's secret. One day she followed him to the stables and watched him walk through the area without restraint while the grooms bowed respectfully as he passed. He entered a nearby house as though he lived inside and her eyes grew to the size of saucers when she saw him come out wearing boots, riding breeches, white shirt and a red silk cap.

Chung Soon slipped away and returned home. Try as she might, she could not unravel the mystery. She knew of the bundle of wood he brought home each afternoon and of the increasing number of yen notes in the glass jar, but she could not guess at the reason for his good fortune.

Spring passed and preparations were begun to ship Flame and five other horses to Japan. The remainder of the stable would stay behind in charge of the number one groom Tirata. The trip to Japan would extend into September and they would return in time for the November race meet in Seoul.

Kim accepted the news but was torn at the thought of being away from his friends. He asked, "You will bring Flame back with you?"

"Kim, my brother, do not pin your heart to a horse. Sadly, their lives are short. You will live longer than Flame or her colts or the foals of her colts."

"Please bring Flame back," the boy whispered.

"I will do all I can."

In the rush of packing and getting the horses to Inchon Harbor, Kim missed a week of school. He saw Flame into her stall on deck and whispered his good-by while she nuzzled against him. The ship sailed with Kan and Takeo waving to him from the rail. The return to the track with Hirata, the groom, was a silent, lonely journey. By the time he had changed clothes and run the two miles to his home, the evening meal was over and his father was waiting for him.

Father Kim sent the daughters outside and came directly to the point.

"Schoolmaster Yu was to see me. He says you have not been to his classes for six days. Is that true?"

"Yes, Father."

"What have you been doing?"

Kim lowered his eyes and remained silent.

"Are you going to answer me?"

"No, Honorable Father, I cannot tell you." Kim began to tremble.

Father Kim considered the refusal. He sensed something deep and close to his son's heart that was keeping him silent and he fought down the anger surging through him. His next words came haltingly.

"My son, I insist you go to Schoolmaster Yu because I do not want you to be a field worker like myself. If you learn your lessons well the Japanese will give you work in their government offices. Many invaders have come to the Land of Chosen and have been driven out. That will happen to the Japanese,

too. We shall then need young men to govern our country. If you have prepared yourself, there will be a place for you when we are free again."

"Yes, Father."

"To make up for the time you have lost, I have made arrangements with Professor Yu and you'll attend his classes morning and afternoon."

It was nearly impossible for Kim to speak, but he managed to whisper, "Yes, Father."

"Now you should eat."

The next morning Chung Soon walked part way to school with Kim. She advised him, "Work hard, keep your eyes and ears open. Learn to make your figures quickly and soon you will be able to return to your horses."

The following weeks were a fever to Kim. He grew to hate the old teacher and the long hours he was forced to spend in the classroom. For the most part, Kim sat with his eyes hidden behind his dreams, or he spent long hours over the drawing of the skeleton of a horse, adding to it the muscles, tendons and vital organs as Takeo had taught him.

So engrossed was he in this task one day that Yu came up behind him and observed the intricate but accurate drawing. He took it from the boy and after studying it carefully, came to a decision. The following day he turned the school over to his assistant and took the train to Sebinggo Station where he walked the half mile to the cavalry barracks to see his old friend Chai Eyi Ja, who was second veterinarian for the Japanese cavalry unit stationed at the barracks.

It was many years since Chai and Yu had seen one another and they were drinking their second cup of tea before the horse doctor was shown Kim's sketch. He studied it for some time before looking up from the paper.

"This is an extraordinary piece of work. Who did it?"

"A young student of mine, Kim Huk Moon."

"How old is he?"

"Coming to nine in a month."

Ja looked pained. "Impossible! Your young friend has cheated. He copied it from a book."

Yu shook his head. "That could not be, respected friend. He made his drawing while in my school. No such book is available. No such picture of a horse is available in our village . . . of that I am certain."

"Somehow the boy has fooled you. Bring him to me and I will question him. We will have him draw another while I watch."

Father Kim agreed to teacher Yu's plan of taking Kim to the cavalry barracks for an examination. The following day the two traveled to the military base. The horse doctor was waiting for them at the gate and, watching Kim closely, conducted a tour of the stable area. Kim grew excited. Never before had he seen so many horses and he recognized instantly these were a type different from his Flame horse. They were larger and bigger boned than the horses at the track, but he had to admit they were fine-looking animals.

Once inside Ja made tea and when the cups had been filled, he placed a paper and brush on the table in front of Kim.

"The Honorable Yu tells me your fingers are very nimble. Draw me a picture of a horse such as the one you drew in school the other day."

Kim looked at the schoolmaster and old Yu nodded in his gentle way and reached out to touch his hand. Kim sensed how much this meant to him; somehow it was important that he draw the picture of a horse. In a minute he was alone. All he knew was the picture Takeo had etched on his mind's eye. Never had his fingers been more sure or his memory more accurate. He was sweating when it was completed and he handed it to the schoolmaster, but Ja grabbed it.

"Where did you learn all this?"

Kim cast a pleading glance for help toward old Yu, but the man offered no relief. He dug his fingers into his legs and remained silent.

Doctor Ja was angered by this insolence and the breath whistled from his nostrils.

"I will take him as an apprentice-servant. That way I shall not have to go to the Japanese commander. I am allowed a servant." He turned hard eyes on Kim. "Before I teach you of horses, young friend, I will teach you manners!"

The words numbed and Kim followed the two men blindly into the courtyard. They were nearing the gate when a large black automobile, flags flying from fender standards, swept inside. The doctor and Yu stiffened to attention and, with eyes to the ground, bowed low. An officer ran from the guardhouse with soldiers sprinting behind him. The soldiers formed three frozen lines and came to attention as the officer drew his sword and saluted.

Kim's heart began to race. The man in the automobile was the Colonel! That must mean Kan and Takeo and Flame were back from Japan. He saw the polished boots approaching. They came to a stop a few feet away.

"Kan is greatly worried about you, young friend. He has gone to your house to look for you."

Kim raised his eyes. "He is back, Honorable Sir?"

The Colonel nodded and smiled. "We are off the ship just a few hours ago."

"And my Flame?"

"She misses you, she has not forgotten." The Colonel turned away and raised his voice, "Dismiss the guard." He climbed into the automobile and, as it moved away, he lifted his hand to Kim and the boy waved back.

Ja grabbed the boy. "Where did you know the Colonel? How? When? Tell me! Quickly, my little friend, dear friend. Now we can make you the number one apprentice. You will live in my quarters as a son."

Kim twisted away from the grasping hands and began to run. He didn't stop until he was at the railway station. Schoolmaster Yu arrived and they made a silent trip back to the village. Kim

was waiting for the train to stop and ran from it toward his hutch. A long, gasping sigh passed his lips as he saw Kan and his father talking.

CHAPTER IV

FATHER KIM was opposed to his son working for the Japanese horseman for several reasons. Such an apprenticeship meant the youngster would be in constant contact with Japanese and his education and life would be guided by them. To a simple laborer who feared and hated the invaders of his country, nothing good could come from such an arrangement.

Furthermore, he knew nothing of horses and horse racing. It was a Japanese sport and few Koreans had the means to participate other than as onlookers, which was enough to condemn it. Also, it was impossible for Father Kim to believe Kan's interest in his son was sincere and motivated by affection.

Kan, a proud man, thought it unnecessary to explain that Kim had saved his life. How could he tell this ignorant Korean field worker a miracle had happened and horse magic had been born in his son's hands?

"I train horses for the commander of the Imperial Cavalry. It is he who has sent me to arrange that your son be an apprentice in his stables. He will be angry indeed that you have dishonored his name by not permitting your son to work for him."

Father Kim knew he was defeated. He said slowly, "My son may be an apprentice to you." He straightened his stooped shoulders. "But he should have time for school."

"Yes, I agree. That is good. The boy must learn other things besides horses. You arrange for the school in the afternoons." He took five notes from his pocket, each worth ten yen. He handed them to the father. "This is our binder. Your son will be assigned to me for five years."

It was at this point Kim came rushing along the street. Breathless from running and speechless from excitement, he threw his arms about the rider while Father Kim stared in disbelief. Suddenly he realized his son had been meeting with this Japanese for a long time . . . He looked at the money in his hand and tossing the bills onto the road, went into the hutch.

Kim and the rider were oblivious to all else. Kan said, "You are to be my apprentice for five years. In that time I shall be too old to ride and you can take my place while I take over from Takeo."

"I will work hard, night and day," Kim promised.

"And each afternoon you will go to school."

Kim made a face. "Do I have to?"

"I promised. Now I must return to the track. There is much to do. You come early in the morning."

"Before the sun is up," Kim laughed. Kan stepped into the waiting rickshaw and the boy stood in the street until the vehicle turned the corner and was lost to view. As he turned to go into the house, he saw the yen bills fluttering on the roadside. They were a disquieting sight and he knew some terrible thing had happened. Gathering the bills together, the boy went slowly into the hut. His mother was busy at the stove and did not give him her usual quick smile and Father Kim sat before the stove smoking his bamboo-stemmed pipe.

The next morning, without waiting for breakfast, Kim was on his way to the track. He raced past the shrill-voiced woman's hut, but so swiftly she failed to see him. Breathless and excited, he went directly to Flame's stall and she turned on his entrance and came to him. As he ran his hand along her neck she leaned against him and her velvet lips searched his hand for sugar. To Kim it was as though they had never been parted.

The happy days sped by for Kim and there was only one cloud of worry on the horizon; his father had not spoken to him since the day Kan called, and the evening meal was a cold and silent affair.

One day many workers appeared at the track and the grounds were cleaned and the stands painted. Someone found the cache of paper and wood under the seats and it was cleaned out. This distressed Kim because he was still lugging a bundle home each afternoon on his way to school, but even this loss was forgotten in the excitement and tension of race week.

Kan explained to Kim, "The Colonel is a wealthy man and money means little to him. His love is horses. He joined the cavalry where he could be with horses. That is why Takeo and I do all we can so his horses will win. His honor is our honor."

Kim became convinced the horses felt the same way as the men and even Flame changed in those last days. The boy thought he imagined it, but as the time grew short, he was certain. No longer was she the playful, teasing animal that made being around her such fun. Racing was serious business and she knew as well as the men who trained her that the days were few.

Kan and Takeo explained betting to the boy and how the men with the chalk and giant blackboards reached the odds on a horse. The next morning Kim brought them the glass jar and they laughed when he asked them to bet the ninety-one yen fifty sen on Flame. They cautioned him that it was not wise to place all on one bet. There was talk of a fast horse from Pusan and even Flame could lose. Kim was adamant . . . all on his favorite.

One morning it was as though flood gates had been opened and a torrent of people let loose. They packed the stands, the center-field area, and hung over the rails. Some had drunk too much *sul* and were boisterous and noisy as crowds gathered around the sweating men making figures on the blackboards. Kim resented the invasion of the quiet, idyllic life he had grown to love and it was evident that Takeo felt much the same way as he muttered, "Man takes a drink, the drink takes a drink, the drink takes the man."

Then all was forgotten save the preparation of their charges to run their best. There were to be four races in the morning

and eight in the afternoon. The morning races were unimportant and none of the Colonel's stable raced in them. In the afternoon Flame was to run in the feature race, which was named in honor of the Japanese Governor-General. The purse was for a thousand yen and a large gold cup.

As Kan explained to Kim, "The money is nothing, but the cup is important. We have won it twice; if we win it this time, the Colonel can keep it."

Kim told his friend, "No horse can beat Flame."

"You're wrong, little trainer. Loyalty is fine, but don't let it blind you. There are over a thousand ways for a horse to lose a race."

By the time Flame was to be led to the paddock for the parade and saddling, Kim's teeth were chattering. He pulled his long-visored cap low over his eyes, and taking the lead strap in hand he began to walk Flame along the outside rail of the track. The filly was restive, excited and small flecks of foam splattered from her mouth. Without looking at her, Kim was aware of the change. It came into his hands through the lead strap and was as definite as an electric impulse. Then it was time for the saddling and Takeo lifted Kan up on the horse.

The rider smiled down on them. "Do not worry too much, my friends, we will not disgrace you."

Takeo and Kim went to the place near the finish line reserved for trainers and grooms. The old trainer pointed out the merits and faults of the other five horses in the race. He dismissed three curtly.

"Their owners have more money than sense. They are willing to pay for the honor of saying their horses ran in the Governor-General Cup Race." Takeo never took his eyes from the horses on the track as he talked. "We can only hope those three cart horses don't clutter the track and prevent an honest race."

He directed Kim's attention to the chestnut horse leading the parade. "Look closely at the Stallion from Pusan. He is all horse and will give Flame all the run she can handle, I fear. With him starting on the inside and our little one on the outside, it may

be too much for her. At sixteen hundred meters he will finish strong."

There was a hush in the crowd as the six horses formed a line abreast and walked toward the starting line. Flame was on the outside with the three cart horses inside and then came a fractious bay from Taegu and the stallion from Pusan in the favored position. Just as they neared the tense moment of starting, the cart horse next to Flame reared and swung its hindquarters in her direction. Fearful of a kick, Kan spun his mount away. At that moment the starter shouted, "Go!"

The crowd roared in dismay and old Takeo beat his hands on the railing. "The man is blind! A blind fool, he is!"

Kim wanted to throw himself to the ground and hide his eyes and close his ears. Yet he could do neither as his eyes glued themselves to the horses speeding down the track.

"Ten lengths behind. It is too much!" Takeo muttered and Kim threw him a shocked glance. When the boy looked back to the race the horses were entering the first turn and Flame had ranged alongside the rearmost cart horse. Slowly, slowly, foot by foot, she edged by and gained on the next in line. Around the turn and into the back stretch the two leaders sped as though death was at their heels with Pusan holding a lead of inches on Taegu.

At the eight hundred meter pole Flame was by the second cart horse and at the withers of the third. There was open daylight of sixty feet between her and the two leaders. Suddenly the Taegu horse wilted; spirit, strength and heart left it at the same time. Flame was past the last cart horse and slipping up on the inside of the faltering Taegu. In a breathless instant she was by this threat and creeping in on the flying Pusan. The crowd let out a full-throated roar as the daylight between the two shrank to less than thirty feet.

The stallion raced into the final turn with Flame closing on his heels. The rider cast a hurried glance over his shoulder and, seeing Kan bearing down on him, began to whip his mount. The chestnut came around the last turn with the rider's arm

flailing and slowly a handbreadth of distance showed between the stallion and the inside rail. Then it was three, then four and five hands as he bore out; then Flame was in that space and running hard. Kim gasped as he saw her head-on; he could hardly recognize his playful, gentle stable pet. This was a different animal, with eyes burning and every muscle and tendon strained to outrace the horse at her side.

Takeo shouted in his ear, "It is all over, Little One. Go to the winner's circle!"

A hundred meters from the finish Flame was in the lead by half the length of her neck and Kan's splendid hands gave her the strength to hold her advantage. On legs weak as bamboo sprouts, Kim ran along the track to meet them as the filly came back at a rocking horse gallop, her head nodding to the thunderous plaudits of the crowd. When she came to Kim she forgot her vanity and rubbed her sweat-wet head against him and he told her she had done well. Kan leaned over and laughed, "Remember! I told you there are a thousand ways to lose a race."

The presentation of the Governor-General's Cup was a tiresome, wordy affair and Takeo fretted that Flame would take a chill before a blanket could be placed on her. Finally it was over and Kim led her back to the stable and all along the way people shouted and cheered.

Hirata came from the betting ring with the winnings and Kim stared at the two hundred ten yen that was his share. Kan asked him, "What are you going to do with so much money? Bet it on other races and bankrupt the money man?"

Kim shook his head, "I'll not bet again. I might lose and if I did, I'd never be able to buy my dream."

"What do you dream, little Kim Huk Moon?"

"Of owning Flame—"

The rider stilled his impulse to laugh and said soberly, "It is a good dream."

The following spring Takeo gave Kim a hand-up to his first horse and he started riding lessons under Kan's critical eye.

Weeks later, he rode Flame on a gallop around the track and felt he had reached a crest in his life that would not be surpassed. After a time, he became exercise boy to the number two horses trained for sale.

The trip to Japan that summer showed Kim sights his wildest dreams could not match. He bought presents for the family at the huge stores in Tokyo and when he returned home he no longer changed into his ragged clothing. When he arrived at the mud and wattle hut Nam Soon was home alone, Chung Soon now being old enough to work in the fields. She was delighted with the dress goods he brought her and promised to have the most beautiful dress in the village. Kim felt it might be easier for his father to accept presents if he were not in the house when they came in from the fields. So he left Nam Soon measuring and planning her dress and walked slowly along the road toward the five street intersection to deliver his present to Schoolmaster Yu.

At the school he found the old teacher with his back to the west so as to catch the last rays of warmth from the setting sun. He turned his faded eyes from the Han River and spoke a warm greeting as Kim held out the tin of tea. The old man took it and read the characters with care.

He said, "I know nothing of the life of men who race horses. It seems a futile, worthless existence. Are you satisfied with your choice?"

"Oh, yes, yes, Honorable Yu! I want nothing else but to live with my horse."

"There is so little happiness in this Land of Chosen I cannot condemn you for a wastrel life with the Japanese."

Kim looked at the ground. "Will you speak to my Honorable Father? He has said no word to me since I became an apprentice."

"Counsel makers between father and son are repulsed like iron on iron. It is for you to find a way back into his heart. Remember, *they* killed his father . . . your grandfather."

It was dark when Kim entered his home. The aroma of Japanese tea mixed with that of tobacco told him his father

had accepted the presents. His mother and Chung Soon greeted him with warm, happy arms and there was unrestrained chattering over the gifts he had brought them. Although Father Kim did not speak, there was a new warmth to his eyes as he gazed on his son.

The wheel of time spun slowly. There were more race meets and more traveling. Now that Kim was more skilled and experienced in riding, he exercised Flame every morning and the attachment and understanding between the two deepened until it became a mysterious, psychic element transcending human or animal links. The old trainer and Kan had watched this strange growth from the first day the boy had touched the little mare. They could not explain it, but they knew such things happened and did not question or hinder.

One day Kan and Takeo asked the boy to join them in their room overlooking the barracks stables. Both were serious and more formal than usual.

Kan spoke, "Little brother, your apprenticeship is over. We have spoken to the Colonel. You will become number two trainer in the stable. You will ride second horses in the morning races."

"In Japan, too?" Kim asked.

Kan sobered. "I don't know. A war has started in Europe. We may not go to Japan until it is over."

Takeo spoke slowly. "Wars are like glanders in a stable. They spread slowly and kill many; there is no explaining them. Life is uncertain in peacetime, but in wartime, never look beyond the next minute."

CHAPTER V

TAKEO BECAME ILL during the winter. He was put to bed in the barracks infirmary, but he grew worse and the Colonel ordered him taken to the Medical College Hospital.

Kan and Kim made the trip with their friend and saw him safely to bed.

On the way back Kan told the boy, "Takeo is an old man. This illness will make him older. When he is well enough to leave the hospital he will be sent back to Japan to retire. Then it will be you and I to take care of the horses."

After many weeks, Takeo was released from the hospital. The rider and Kim went for him and helped pack his few belongings. The boy was distressed by the change in his friend. It was as though all the years had rolled up and struck him a mighty blow on the shoulders.

Later they saw him to his cabin aboard the ship at Inchon. From somewhere he drew on a secret supply of strength and squared his shoulders.

"I will meet you in Japan soon and we will race together once more, the three of us. We were a great team. We filled the Colonel's trophy case with cups. We will do it again."

Kim wanted to cry as he held the old man close and felt the sharp bones and smelled the age of him. The rider was equally disturbed and the automobile was on the outskirts of Sosa before either found words.

Kim spoke first, "Being at home with his family will do him good. Maybe he will get strong enough to work again?"

Kan shook his head. "The days of his years are numbered. All we can do is pray they will be easy ones."

"And you will be number one trainer and rider."

"You will be number one rider." At the boy's startled expression Kan hurried on, "I have spoken to the Colonel. I am too old to ride."

"But you are not old," Kim protested.

Kan agreed smilingly, "As a man, that is true. As a rider, it is not. With horses you have always been old beyond your years. You are fourteen, you will be the number one rider."

"And I will ride Flame in a race!" Kim cried.

"You will ride Flame in her last race . . . this is her last season. If she were not such a great one and a favorite of all, she

would even now be on the big place in Japan raising colts for us to train and race."

Kim dug his toes into the rich nap of the carpeting in the automobile. When she retired someone else would be caring for her; he might never see her again. He whispered, "Since the first day I saw her I've dreamed of owning her."

"I know. Your heart is in your eyes." Then, softly, "It can never be, number one, so don't build your castles. The Colonel would not sell her for all the gold in the Imperial Treasury."

Since the completion of his apprenticeship, it was Kim's custom to spend one night a week with his family. Nam Soon had married and was living with her husband in the village of Kumho-Dong. Her man was a worker for a silk manufacturer and spent his days tending the vast fields of mulberry. Chung Soon, though older than her sister, had shunned marriage and it was a sore point with her parents.

With each visit, Kim was shocked by the hunched, sickly look of his father, whose cough was worse . . . after a bad spell he hid the cloth that had been to his lips.

For the first time in six years, Kim spoke directly to his father and urged him to stop work and sit in the sun and rest. The old man heard him out and, turning on his heel, left the room. Kim knew he was defeated.

He lost himself in his work. Each day there were ten horses to exercise and his body grew lean and tough and his mind alert and senses tuned to the spirit of the animal between his knees. With all horses he instinctively sensed their vagaries, but with Flame there was more . . . it was as though they spoke a language unknown to others.

As the time grew near for the race meet, Kim felt wires of tension turning tighter and tighter inside himself. No longer did he sleep the calm, dreamless sleep of the unworried as night after night he awakened to find himself sitting stiffly upright and sweating. Flame had fallen and broken a leg; Flame had been crowded into the rail and a shaft of wood had run her through;

Flame had been crippled by a kicking stallion. Each time the dream was different, but each was tragic, each ended with a pistol shot in her brain.

Kan sensed the disquiet in the boy and saw it in the pale, taut face and a doubt flickered through him. Was it possible there was a flaw and the boy could not face up to racing competition? Was he a morning rider, an exercise boy only?

Kan watched in silence and when he handed the boy into the saddle for the race, he covered his misgivings with a confident smile.

As though in a fog the boy went through the parade before the stands and the walk-up to the starting line. The little red mare kept her position so that none gained an advantage; no horse could crowd her and prove a hamper, and all the time she awaited the shout of the starter. When it came she was away like a shot and in less than a hundred meters she was clear of the pack and ranged alongside the horse on the rail. Stride for stride, the two raced into the turn and on around.

When they sped into the turn for the finish line, Kim felt Flame begin to gather for the long run home. She moved up on her rival and was in the lead by the length of her neck when she seemed to hang in midstride. Flutterings of anxiety came along the reins and into Kim's hands as she frantically called on him for help. Kim looked down and back to see the rival rider, crouching low, hanging onto Flame's saddle cloth. Kim lashed out with his whip, striking the fellow's wrist a cutting blow and Flame shot into the lead.

The crowd roared as their favorite sped under the wire fifty meters in the lead. Flame came back to the winner's circle in her arched-neck, rocking horse gallop and tossing her head to the cheering people. All the way back to the stable she tossed her head and minced along on primping steps until Kim laughed at her vanity.

"I was a help to you," he told her. "You didn't win it all by yourself, you know."

One night, not long after, a soldier-orderly awakened Kan

at midnight and told him he was wanted by the Colonel. Kan dressed hurriedly and left. When he returned he sat on a folded blanket beside Kim's sleeping pad.

"War has started between Japan and the United States. Already there has been a big battle and we have won."

Kim held his breath as he tried to imagine what a battle was like. He had seen the cavalry in their parade ground exercises and supposed it was like these maneuvers.

He asked, "What will happen to the Colonel?"

"He leaves tomorrow. He will take an airplane from Kimpo and I go with him."

Kim tried not to let Kan hear the heavy sigh, "Let me go with you?"

Kan took his hand. "No, Little One. Overnight you are to become the Big One. All the cavalry horses will soon be shipped to Japan. Until arrangements can be made to ship Flame and the others to Japan, you'll take them to the track stables and care for them until word comes. Hirata will be instructed that you are the number one."

"What will you do?"

"Fight for the Emperor, of course. The Colonel will arrange that I go into training to become a war flyer." He smiled, "I will take a flying machine jumping over the clouds rather than a horse over the ground."

After Kim saw his friends off from the Kimpo Airport, the days and weeks rolled by with little change. The horses were exercised, cared for and put back into their stalls. The government announced there would be no more racing until the war was over, and the other horses housed at the track were taken away until only the Colonel's ten remained.

A letter arrived from Kan stating he was happy with flying and was now taking his plane up alone. The letter also told him Takeo was still hanging onto life and that the Colonel was out of the country fighting for the Emperor.

One night he went home to find his mother completely unnerved and wailing; Father Kim had been drafted by the police

and shipped away to work on a dam in the Hwachon area. The village was to supply one hundred men for the project and Father Kim's name had been drawn by lot from the files at the police station. That he was a sick man and no longer capable of hard work had not the slightest effect on the police sergeant. The police had arrived in the middle of the night and before daylight the enforced laborers were aboard a train and jolting northward.

Upon his return to the track he found the horses and stablemen being mustered by a Japanese in army uniform with a long sword clattering at his heels.

Kim bowed low before the man. "I am Kim Huk Moon, number one rider for His Excellency the Colonel. These horses were left in my charge, Honorable Sir. May I ask what you propose to do with them?"

The officer ignored Kim and spoke to Hirata, "You will take your horses to the farms south of Inchon. You and the animals will work the fields and haul rice to the ships in Inchon harbor.

"You will be in charge. Put this Korean dog to work as a servant." Hirata bowed and the Japanese officer struck a pose. "Our enemies, the Yankee big noses, are strong. All must work to bring victory to the Emperor." He was being carried away by his own oratory . . . "It is the will of his Excellency, the Governor-General, that these horses work for the Emperor." He strode away with the sword scabbard fingering a thin line in the dust. As though he had forgotten until this moment, he turned and there was a cruel smile on his lips.

"Your Colonel is dead. He fought well and died for the Emperor. He fell like a cherry blossom."

The journey to the south was begun before daylight. It was dark when they reached their destination. They were shown a small hutch in which to sleep, but there were no stables for the horses. Grumbling and stumbling about in the darkness, the horses were off-loaded and the packs opened. Kim gave Flame an extra portion of barley and rubbed her down thoroughly.

In the morning they discovered their hutch was near a high enclosure of barbed wire. Inside the wire compound were many men, giants of men. A Japanese official told them they were American prisoners . . . big noses from America who had been defeated and captured by the victorious soldiers of the Emperor.

The rules of conduct and their duties were laid down. Japanese soldiers would guard and control the prisoners both inside the wire compound and while working the fields. Hirata and his group would take instructions from the supervisor of the farms and haul rice and other farm produce to Inchon for shipment overseas. Stern measures would be taken with anyone fraternizing with the prisoners.

Flame accepted the harness and shafts of the cart with resignation. Kim tried to explain matters to her, but was sure her expression was one of reproach and disgust. In the fields he came close to the white foreigners. Kim marveled at the size of them . . . tall and straight like bamboo, but they all looked alike. There was one, however, he could distinguish from the others because his hair was so yellow, his eyes so blue.

The blond's appraisal of Flame was experienced and admiring.

"That's quite a horse you've got there, Buster."

The prisoner put his hand on Flame's neck and she leaned into it. For Flame to react in such manner to a stranger was most unusual. Kim smiled.

Speaking in halting Japanese, the man asked, "Are you Nipponese?"

Kim shook his head vigorously, "I am Korean." He picked up a handful of earth to show he was from the Land of Chosen. "I am Kim Huk Moon."

"Kim Huk Moon—" The giant pointed a long finger at himself, "Bill Duffy."

"Bill Duffy," Kim repeated the words slowly.

A Japanese soldier saw them and came running with his bayonet at thrust position. A Japanese officer heard and he, too,

came running. With one swipe Kim was struck to the ground. While the soldier held Duffy at bayonet point, the officer beat the American over the head and shoulders with a leather riding crop.

After the officer tired, the giant was led away to the monkey cage for punishment while the others were hustled to loading the carts. Kim was warned—if he were seen talking to another big nose he would be sent north to work in the mines.

The next morning when Kim led Flame past the compound, he saw the American in the monkey cage. The cage, a cocoon of woven barbed wire, was too small for its occupant to do other than stand erect or fold into a tight knot and sit on his heels. It was a form of Japanese punishment all Koreans recognized. Kim knew thirty-six hours would break a man; forty-eight would put him in a state of mental and physical collapse and sixty would produce a frothing insanity from which few recovered.

Kim pretended to adjust the harness. While squatting under Flame's belly and tugging at the leather straps, he noted the position of the sentry who was patrolling a safe distance away.

Kim said, "Beel Duffee—" then, in Korean, he added "my heart is with you."

The cold blue eyes warmed, "Watch yourself, Kim Huk Moon."

Kim learned much in the following days. He saw the pitiful amount of rice given the prisoners for food and learned that once a week they were served a thin soya bean soup that was little better than hot water. Though the prisoners handled tons of rice a day, the guards were so strict none was able to secrete even a handful in his rugged clothing. Those who were caught were given twenty-four hours in the monkey cage.

Bill Duffy was the bellwether, the standard bearer for the others and he came from the cage unbowed, but his ribs protruded through his skin in ugly ridges and blue-black circles rimmed his eyes.

Kim worried and planned a way to get rice to his friend be-

fore the man died of starvation. One day he bought a bamboo walking staff. That night Kim carved a tight fitting cap to the handle joint. With the cap removed, the bamboo was hollow to the next joint and would hold three handfuls of rice. With a second staff of like size, he carved a similar cap and hid it in the straw.

The next day at the loading platform Kim developed a limp and leaned heavily on his staff. When the sentries were otherwise occupied, he caught the American's eye and motioned for him to begin to limp also. Duffy could not understand the pantomime, shook his head and went on with the loading of sacks. Enroute to Inchon Kim removed the cap of his staff and pushed the open end through the loose weave of the rice straw bags. When the bamboo came out it was filled to the first joint and, with the cap in place, no one would suspect it contained three handfuls of rice.

During the following days Kim attempted to convey to Duffy that he wanted him to become lame so there would be an excuse to lean on a staff. The American knew the boy was attempting to convey a message and his face clouded with anger for not being able to grasp its import.

One day when there was a great hullabaloo over a sack of rice that was dropped and burst open, Kim removed the cap and revealed the rice in the handle. Instantly the American's face lighted with understanding and it was not many minutes before he tumbled from the platform and set up a terrific wailing. It was so genuine that even the guards were impressed. When Duffy attempted to stand, his right ankle was like rubber and he yowled even louder.

Kim said to the Japanese NCO in charge. "Honorable Sergeant, Sir, you have the big heart of a brave fighting soldier. Allow me to give the big nose my bamboo stick so he may walk.

"It will take four men to carry such a big one back to the wire enclosure and we will be late with the loading, which will make the Honorable Lieutenant yell like he did the other day."

The sergeant said, "Give him the stick."

Kim held out the bamboo to Duffy. In a loud voice he shouted, "Here you are, clumsy big nose. Use my stick. I should beat you with it for delaying us."

Duffy took the stick and got to his feet by leaning heavily on it. The corners of his mouth jerked and his eyes were warm and slightly moist when he looked at Kim.

"I love you, Buster," he mumbled.

The next day Kim carried the staff he had buried in the straw and on the road to Inchon filled the handle with rice. The following morning he and Duffy effected an exchange. Each day this was done and Duffy, in turn, gave the rice to fellow prisoners who were suffering the worst for malnutrition. To protect Kim and assure the Japanese would not take away his staff, Duffy beat his ankle nightly to keep it puffed and discolored.

One morning, when Duffy failed to exchange walking sticks, Kim was puzzled but he soon realized the American was doing his own stealing.

Before long another prisoner came down lame and was forced to implement his walking with a bamboo stick. Kim hugged himself with delight when he saw several more taken lame and leaning on crutches of bamboo. He hoped they would not overdo it and make the Japanese suspicious, but Duffy was aware of this danger also and would allow no more than one in fifteen to go lame.

But one day tragedy struck. One of the prisoners dropped his bamboo staff . . . the cap flew off and rice spilled onto the ground. Amidst loud yelling, beatings and swearing, all walking sticks were collected; and were found to contain stolen rice. The sergeant of the guard remembered Kim presenting the bamboo to Duffy. Without asking for a confession or allowing a denial, he descended on the boy with maniacal fury and beat him into an unconscious state.

The excitement was too much for high-strung Flame, and matching the savagery about her, she went berserk and kicked her way free of the hated cart and harness.

When Kim regained his senses he was in a barbed wire cage. It was a long time before his eyes would focus and he could make out Duffy in the cage next to him. It was still longer before he could move and when he did it brought such pain he groaned.

Duffy, his huge body a cross section of welts, heard the boy. Through puffed lips and over a cotton-dry tongue, his voice was a growl.

"I'm sorry I got you into this, Buster, but our day will come. Live! Live for it! The day we win this war will be the Day of Judgment."

Forty-eight hours later Kim was taken from the cage and thrown into the stall with Flame as a concession to the animal. Since the day she had kicked her way free of the cart, she would not allow the other handlers to water and feed her.

Kim never did remember the days or how many there were before he awakened one morning to find Chung Soon bathing him. She had made the journey to deliver a letter from Takeo. The boy's first regard was for Flame and he leaned weakly against the horse as his hand ran over her body. She was thin and it was not until she was fed and watered that he took the letter into the light. A blinding pain darting across his eyes made standing erect difficult.

Carefully folded in the heavy envelope were five one hundred yen notes. Kim looked about quickly as he pocketed the bills. Good old Takeo. He would not forget that money was needed for feed and supplies. He smiled at Chung Soon . . . money worries were over now and they could buy winter wood and food. He began to read. The first words brought a tremor to his hands and his face grew pinched and old. Turning toward the stall he went to the horse and pressed his throbbing head into her mane.

"Kan was killed in battle."

He sat in the straw and Chung Soon settled beside him with her arm about his shoulders. His breathing was so heavy she

turned her head that she might not embarrass him to see him crying.

As Chung Soon prepared to leave, she asked Kim to walk with her for a short distance. When they were alone on the road, she told him that their father had died working on the dam and that Schoolmaster Yu had told her the war was going badly for the Japanese; that she acted as messenger for him and meetings were being held and plans laid for a new government once the Nipponese were defeated. Kim was startled by the news. He had never dreamed the Japanese would be defeated. What would that mean to Flame, he wondered? No matter what happened, peace or war, they must never be separated. He watched Chung Soon down the road until she was out of sight.

That night he suffered a searing, tearing pain over his left eye. He had experienced many such attacks, but this was much the worst. He was wet and trembling when it finally passed.

In the morning, for the first time, he noticed he was nearly blind in his left eye. When he held his hand over his right eye, all he could see were shadows.

As slowly as a tule fog slipping away from low ground, changes occurred in the Japanese personnel of the prison encampment. Those who had been cruel and savage walked with fear in their eyes and no longer went into the enclosure alone. The ration of rice for the prisoners was increased and doctors made a show of concern over the health and welfare of their charges. Less and less work was required of the Americans in the fields and a blanket of tense waiting covered the land. No longer were heard the shouting and cursing of guards and the sodden blows of clubs on bowed backs. No one had been thrown into the wire cages for many weeks.

It all happened overnight. The next morning the savage sergeant of the guard as well as the lieutenant were gone. All who remained were those Japanese who had done their duty fairly and without cruelty. The rest had taken to the hills.

The gate of the enclosure was open and the Americans were milling around and shouting and laughing. Duffy saw Kim lead

Flame from the hutch, and came running. He threw his arms about the boy and swung him in great circles. There were tears in his blue eyes and unashamedly he held Kim close and hugged him.

"I love you, Buster!" Duffy shouted and waved his long arms to the surrounding, shouting prisoners. Duffy quieted them.

"If it wasn't for this kid, a lot of us wouldn't have made it. Before we head for Inchon we've gotta see what we can do for him. Get that Jap translator over here."

The translator, an anemic little man wearing heavy glasses, was dragged from the administration building into the center of the circle.

Duffy said, "You're all right, Mr. Moto. We're not going to hurt you." The Japanese wet his lips and smiled briefly. "Tell our friend here, Kim Huk Moon, that we are proud to be his friend. Tell him we want to do something for him. Ask him what he wants most of all in this whole, wide, beautiful world."

Kim listened carefully to the interpreter. He looked at Duffy and then he looked at Flame. He began to tremble as he had at the track railing ten years before.

"Tell my worthy American friend I would rather own this horse than live until tomorrow."

Kim's wish was made known. Duffy nodded as though he had guessed as much. Telling the other Americans they should be ready to leave for Inchon in an hour, he led Kim and the interpreter to the administration building. When suitable heavy paper was found that pleased him and the Japanese had his writing brush poised, Duffy began to dictate: "To those whom it may concern: In acknowledgment of the loyalty and courage of one, Kim Huk Moon . . ."

CHAPTER VI

KIM AND FLAME RETURNED to Seoul. At the track they found disrepair and weeds. Vandals had torn away doors and all burnable materials and the stables looked hollow-

eyed and gaunt. Kim found an old beggar, Lee Bok Won, living in one of the stalls.

He said to him, "Old man, you know this horse and you know me. At night you sleep in her stall and guard her. I have nothing but Japanese money and it is worthless, but I will see that your rice bowl is filled each day. When racing starts again I will have money and you will have money."

At home Kim found his sisters in the yard with the children. Nan Soon's youngest was learning to walk and had no memory of him, but the older boy Yon came running. Mother Kim was inside the house and not far from the stove, though it was a warm day. He looked at this withered, fragile woman and thought of a hillside flower in the late fall.

After the first babble of greetings was over, Kim learned of a happy circumstance. On School master Yu's advice, Chung Soon had spent all her Japanese money for food before the war ended and the yen became worthless. No matter what happened, there would be food for some time. This had been a worry to the boy, and more than ever he realized what a debt he owed Chung Soon.

Two clouds darkened the boy's horizon. The headaches he suffered were not so frequent nor so violent, but the sight of the left eye was completely gone. This worried him because it would affect his riding in races. He was thankful it was the left eye because he could still see the rail through his right.

The other problem was Nam Soon's husband. Only one letter had been received since he had been shipped overseas in a Korean labor unit. His letter had stated he was in the 204th Naval Construction Battalion; that he was on an island and the work was heavy; that he was well, but was longing for the day when he could return to his family in the Land of Chosen.

Kim took the letter to a government building in the center of the city. In a confusion of hallways, endless queues of people and harried clerks, he finally came on a sweating, overworked fellow. The man read the letter and checked the information with a mass of papers.

He told Kim, "Your brother-in-law was with the Japanese forces on the island of Iwo Jima. There were no Korean survivors from that battle."

With a heavy heart Kim took the news to his sister. Her grief was uncontrollable. Two days later her body was found in the Han River. When Chung Soon came running to the track, Kim put his arm about her and wiped her tears and held her close.

"Little sister, we now have a family."

Kim worked long and patiently with Flame. The mare, now twelve years old, came to condition slowly. The spirit and heart were still there, but the rice carts of Anyang had stolen the vibrance from her muscles.

The boy put himself through an equally rigorous program of learning to see all that must be seen in a race, with one eye. His ears and senses must tell him when a horse was slipping up on his blind side.

The wheel of time spun slowly. The Seoul City Race Club was formed. Bin was elected president. More and more horses returned to training at the track, but all were suffering from cart-horse muscles developed during the war. The stables were repaired and the ground cleaned until the look of the old days returned and then, one day, the dates for the first race meet were announced.

The first day of the race meet was a gala occasion. It was more than a festival; it was a manifestation of freedom by the freedom-loving Koreans. The people began to arrive early and before the first of the morning races, the grounds were packed. By midday when the better horses were to run, the crowd was a straining, seething mass. It was said there were nearly a hundred thousand present.

The shadows were long and the day cooler when the seven horses in the feature race walked toward the barrier. Kim had drawn number five position, which put him in the middle. Twice the horse on Kim's blind side slammed into Flame and for the first time cool, confident Flame was unsettled. Kim

shouted angrily at the rider on his left. Thus diverted, he missed the starting signal and they were the last away.

Flame wanted to fling herself at the leaders and run them down, but Kim eased her into stride and tried to console her into a more rational pace. Kicking up a blizzard of clod and cutting dirt, the pack went into and around the first turn. On straightening out for the long run down the back stretch, Kim gave the signal and the little mare began her move. For the distance of two hundred meters Flame ran on the heels of the three leaders who were abreast and nose-to-nose. As the three-some went into the turn, a dart of light shone between the rail and the pole horse. Kim and Flame saw it at the same time and they rushed into it. Keeping his eye on the rail, Kim shifted his weight to the left to meet the bumping he felt would come, for the rider was Choi Chang, a lusty, rough one. Choi yelled and came over on them. Kim met the weight and kept Flame off the dangerous railing. Fighting doggedly to keep on her feet, the little horse wedged and drove herself farther into danger.

Slowly, inexorably, Flame fought forward until she was eye to eye with her rival, but Kim knew she was through, exhausted. Her stride had shortened and was jerky, and as he looked down the long straightaway to the finish line, he knew that even her great heart could not carry her that far.

And then it happened. As Choi came over with all his weight for a final lunge that would knock Flame and Kim into the rail, his stirrup strap broke. With a scream he went down. The riderless horse swerved to the outside and further impeded the others. In an instant Kim and Flame were in the clear and ran free to the wire.

Her gait was so rough he was in a panic that she was badly injured. He eased her to a stop as soon as he could and slipped from the saddle. Her legs were cut and bleeding and her left quarter torn and the shoe missing from the hoof, but the injuries were not serious. He led her slowly back to the winner's circle. There was no rocking horse show from Flame this day and Kim knew she would never race again.

Through the months that followed, Kim searched for a stallion to mate with Flame. There were always shortcomings in the blood lines or conformation or disposition. He must have a horse with the blood of kings in its veins and the "look of the eagle" in its eyes. Then he remembered the stallion from Pusan.

As the day for her delivery grew nearer, Kim went home for the evening meal, but returned to the stable to spend the night. It was three o'clock one morning when he sent Won running for the horse doctor. As the red sun of June came over the Han, the newly foaled filly stood on trembling legs and suckled the soothing colostrum of its first meal. Kim smoothed the sweat-streaked neck of Flame and the mare leaned her head against him.

"What a fine one, Flame, and just like you except for her one red stocking. And that is good or I could never tell you apart when she grows."

Three mornings later Kim was terrorized when he opened the stall door to find Flame dripping with sweat and head hanging. Won ran for the doctor and the man did what he could. He kept mumbling, "Fever, it is the fever. One can do so little with this sort of fever."

Kim did not leave the stall and Chung Soon brought him food and tried to console him. On the seventh day at dawn she came to the stall to find Kim sitting in the straw stroking Flame's head. After a time she was able to coax him from the place and they took a long walk through the mulberry orchards and along the riverbank. When they returned, Won had taken care of things and the stall was empty save for the little red filly.

The rider, Choi Chang Ju, who had tried so desperately to win from Flame in her last race, took charge of the grief-dumb Kim.

"I have a mare who dropped a foal three days ago. She is big and strong; she can feed two as well as one. Come with me, Worthy Rider, and we will see your new Flame winning races in no time."

Kim saw his week-old filly to its foster mother's side and then left the track. The place was wrapped in so many memories

he did not have it in his heart to return. He sat in the sun with his back against the wall of the old hutch and grieved. A sad mischance brought a long-delayed letter from Japan. Takeo had been dead for months. To the boy, this broke the circle. Kan, Flame and Takeo were gone and he was alone.

The filly was sixteen months old before Kim saw her again. He was entering the gate by the grandstand one early morning when he froze in his tracks and the breath whistled from his throat. Flame was in the center field with other youngsters, but the boy had no eyes for any but the little red. She tired of feeding and, ranging alongside her "twin," roughed and jostled it and then broke away in a rocking horse gait. It was Flame come to life! There was a purity of motion about her that Kim had seen only in one other horse and the hatred drained from his heart and he felt mean.

Kim was over the rail with a bound. The filly came close to him and leaned her head against him. The boy slipped his arm about her neck and held her close.

"I'm sorry, Flame, I'm sorry," he whispered. After a time he led her to the old stall and put her inside. "It's about time you learn to be a running horse." When he left the stall he was a little surprised that Kan and Takeo were not waiting for him.

The filly came to hand quickly, eagerly. She had more intelligence than Kim had known in a horse and there was a searching curiosity about her that was nearly human. There was an eagerness to learn that made training little more than showing her once. Before their reunion was three months old, Kim was forced to admit that the filly had qualities never shown by her mother.

Day after day, week after week, the filly went to school and her talents and speed increased. In racing brushes with other horses she sped away from them and was as delighted with herself as was her rider. The summer race meet in July was announced and Kim pointed her training to the big day.

One late afternoon, as he was putting Flame away for the night, Choi came running.

"War has started!" he shouted. "The communists from the North country are fighting us."

"What does that mean, friend Choi?"

"If they win, it means we will live as we lived under the Japanese. It means they will take away our horses. Under them no man may even own the air he breathes. I am sending my horses south with my old father. I will join the army to fight these invaders."

Kim nodded and remembered the Chinese tattooed man. From then on he thought of communists as being like that man.

"I will take my ancient mother south to Pusan and then I will join you."

Mother Kim refused to leave the old mud hut she had lived in so many years. Kim pleaded with her and made her listen to the crash of heavy guns moving nearer and nearer. The sight of her neighbors packing and fleeing, prevailed at last and a hurried collection of belongings began. Improvising a harness, Flame was put to an abandoned night-soil cart. Into this Kim packed the sleeping mats, cooking jars and food. On top went his mother and the children. With Chung beside him he took the lead strap and they joined the endless queue of frightened people. The filly accepted the strange assignment without fuss or complaint.

Such slow progress was made that it was past midnight before they were near the ferry site. Obviously there would be no crossing at this point with frantic thousands waiting ahead of them, and it was impossible to continue along the river and cross at the Yongdongpo Bridge. Turning inland, Kim led his party through a mulberry orchard and across a rice paddy. Above the village of Chusong-Jong he made his way to the river-bank.

"We must swim the river," he whispered to Chung Soon.

Unhitching Flame from the cart, Kim took her to the water's edge. Kim turned to Chung Soon.

"Hang onto Flame's tail. She will swim you across."

Kim removed the headstall and with his hand on the filly's

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mane moved into the water beside her. The river was shallow from summer drought and they were quite some distance from the bank before Flame let out a snort and began to swim. Kim trailed beside her with his fingers woven in her mane.

Kim guessed Flame swam three hundred meters before her feet came to bottom again. Another period of wading and they stood on the southern bank. In the darkness they searched out a flat, smooth campsite.

"You wait here. I will send Flame back with the children. You meet her and send her back."

Kim pointed Flame into the river again and was towed to the northern bank. He lifted Yon from the cart and onto her back.

"Hold on tight and Flame will take you to Chung Soon," he directed.

Without order the filly headed into the river while Kim stood to his knees in water and followed their progress by the sound of her swimming. He shivered; the water was colder than he had expected. He was becoming anxious with the waiting when he heard Flame swimming, and soon she stood beside him. He held her head close to his wet body and waited until her breathing was normal before lifting little Nam Soon onto her back. The child was near to hysteria and refused to go alone. So once again Flame had to tow Kim and carry Nam Soon.

Mother Kim, too, was terrified by the thought of crossing the river with the horse. Patiently Kim explained that it had to be done, that it was safe and that the little horse was a strong swimmer, but her terror refused to wash away with his assurances. Finally he lifted her from the cart and carried her to the water's edge. Interlocking his fingers in Flame's tail, he spoke to the filly and she moved forward.

It was desperately hard work towing the two, and the crossing was slow. When the little horse touched the far shore she stood with head hanging and flanks heaving. Kim left her and carried his mother ashore. She was moaning from the shock of the experience and the chill of the water. Chung Soon held her close in an effort to warm her old bones, but to no avail.

The succeeding days and nights brought a hunted life to Kim and his family. With Mother Kim and little Nam Soon riding, they moved southward along the gutted roads. No matter how fast they traveled, it seemed as though the sound of enemy guns remained at the same distance behind. They were heartened when they met many Americans moving northward. The Americans would soon drive out the invaders, Kim told his family as he scanned the faces, praying that he might see Duffy.

They buried Mother Kim on a hillside overlooking the Naktong River. She had never recovered from the night river crossing.

Pusan was chaotic and wild with rumors and the harbor filled with ships bringing supplies and men to fight against the invaders. This heartening sight did not still the panic brought by the news that American troops had been defeated and were also being driven southward.

Kim searched out his friend Lee Eyi Ja, who owned Flame's sire, and all were given food and shelter.

Two days of rest and Kim went into the city to join the Korean Army. They soon discovered his blind eye and he was refused armed service, but was put to work on the docks unloading American ships. In marshaling every man and animal to the job of repelling the invaders, Flame and her sire came to hauling cartloads of military supplies from the harbor to the huge dumps on the skirt of the city.

It was not long before Kim learned the Marines were fighting in the hills not far from his mother's grave and had thrown the invaders back into the Naktong River . . . and Pusan was saved. But the war went on. The work was hard and the hours long and there was never enough rice, though Chung Soon worked in the fields.

It was a year before the boy put Flame to a cart and headed northward. Each mile brought them across scenes of destruction and the answer to the rice shortage lay before them in the crushed paddy dikes and barren fields. The Yongdongpo Bridge had been destroyed, but rebuilt so as to support single lines of

traffic, and everywhere buildings were down and the red tile of their roofs lay in the streets. It was a sad return along the banks of the Han to see so many landmarks in the ruin of rubble.

In their village they found most of the buildings showing the destructive marks of war. Their home was without a roof or a north wall. Hard work put it into condition for shelter and Kim went looking for work. There was nothing at the race track as the grounds were being used by small airplanes and helicopters of the American Army. As in the other war, the race horses had become cart horses with a few still housed in their old stalls.

Yon was old enough to take care of his sister during the day, so Chung Soon went to work in the rice fields. Kim took a job carting rice from the fields to the government warehouse at the old Cavalry Barracks.

Choi returned to the track one day. He had lost an arm in the fighting around Wonju and was coughing badly. His spirits were good, however, and he made Kim laugh with his tales of fighting. When he had been wounded, it was an American doctor who lopped off his left arm just below the elbow. They had given him a paper which would take him into any American military hospital and he had been promised an artificial arm when the stump was healed.

One afternoon little Yon came screaming along the road. The boy was babbling hysterically. At Kim's urging. Flame sped the cart over the rough roads at a reckless pace to the village. They found the house crowded with the curious and the doctor working over Chung Soon while she lay on a sleeping pad. Her lips were pulled away from her teeth in a wolfish snarl and her cries filled the room. Kim learned what had happened . . . while working in the fields someone had stepped on a land mine. Four people had been killed and several hurt. Chung Soon had lost her left leg. The doctor already had removed the mangled limb.

Kim motioned his neighbors from the house and asked the doctor, "What can be done?"

"There is nothing more I can do. Hospital beds are all for the soldiers. I cannot even get the drugs I need."

Kim went to his sister and, sitting beside her, lifted her head onto his lap. His gentle hand stroked the cold, damp forehead. She opened her eyes and recognized him.

"Rest, little sister, rest."

When she was asleep he went into the yard. He was shocked to see Choi white-faced and grim, beating the stump of his arm with a stick.

"Have you gone crazy?" Kim cried.

Choi rose; he swayed dizzily. "I will go to the University Hospital now. When they see my stump they will admit me for treatment. Come to visit me tomorrow. I will have the drugs for little Chung Soon."

The next day it took nearly two hours for Kim to gain admittance to the hospital. Choi had the promised drugs and the sad news that he would be confined for several days because of the inflammation in his arm . . . he had beaten it too hard. As Kim left the hospital grounds he saw several Korean soldiers taking their first steps with artificial limbs.

Two days later, when Choi showed up Kim said, "I must get one of those legs for Chung Soon. You know, the kind I see the soldiers wearing at the hospital."

Choi turned a long face to Kim. "I have asked. They are very expensive unless you are a soldier. For Chung Soon it would cost much money."

"Chung Soon has spent her life taking care of me. It is my turn now. I will get her a leg. Once I wanted to own Flame more than I wanted my next breath. I did own Flame; I own Flame's image. And now I want a leg for Chung . . . I will get such a leg."

The weeks slipped by and the coolness of late October was in the air. Kim and Choi finished their hauling early one day and hurried to the track. They saddled Flame and Kim took her for a gallop on the long unused track. The filly responded

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and skylarked with the joy of running free again. When American airmen gathered at the rail to watch, she began her vain, rocking horse gait and they applauded.

Choi held her while Kim rubbed her down and the two talked about the days to come when the war would be over and there would be racing again. They put the filly in the stall with a feed of hoarded grain and were about to leave when three Americans drove up in a jeep. Proud of knowing their language, Choi spoke to them. After many words back and forth, Choi said to Kim, "They are looking for a horse. They want to buy a horse to carry ammunition."

Without speaking or moving, Kim watched Choi and the American move along the stalls and peer inside. Kim closed his eyes and waited when the officer unlatched the door and stepped into the stall with Flame. He didn't open them until Choi called, "He wants to buy Flame!"

Kim gritted his teeth. "Tell him to go away."

Choi whistled. "He will pay in American green money. He will pay two hundred and fifty dollars."

Kim's throat was stiff, parched. "Will that buy a leg for Chung?"

Choi saw his friend's face. He whispered, "Yes, my brother, it will buy a leg."

"Tell him to leave the stall." When they were outside Kim entered and closed the door. Flame turned to him and leaned her head against him. He held her close. "I'm sorry, Flame, I'm sorry. *Anyunghée keh sipseeayah.*"

Kim helped load the little sorrel into the trailer and watched them out of sight. Without looking at Choi he went into the stall and closed the door. The strength left his legs and he slumped in the corner. For the first time since Kim Huk Moon was eight, he cried.

IT WAS NEITHER by accident nor frivolous whim that Flame came to join the Marine Corps. A young Marine officer recognized the necessity of having a horse to carry ammunition for his recoilless rifles. At a cost of \$250 to himself he filled this need (and a junior officer, with family, is intimate with the contents of his purse). It was no accident, either, that Flame should become a legend in a corps of men which breeds legends. The whole pattern of her life had been based on loyalty and steadfastness.

Explanations as to the military situation at this time must be borne to understand why Lt. Eric Pedersen drove to the Seoul race track on that October day to purchase a horse.

Fighting in the vicinity of the truce-talk village of Panmunjom (called Yak Yak Town by the Marines) placed restrictions on United Nations troops in the sector. When Panmunjom was selected as a site for the meeting place, the negotiators drew a circle on a map. This circle was 2,000 meters in diameter with Panmunjom at the hub. Both sides agreed not to fire into, over or through this circle. Inasmuch as Panmunjom was 5,000 meters forward of the United Nations Main Line of Resistance (MLR), it was necessary to establish a neutral corridor through which United Nations personnel could move to and from meetings. This strip, 200 meters wide, was to be held inviolate, as was the circle.

A thousand meters east of the Panmunjom circle was Combat Outpost No. 2. It was manned by nearly 300 Marines. Besides the usual sector weapons, it mustered mortars, both 60 mm. and 81's, three tanks and two Quad 50's. It was a stronghold, a fortress and its proximity to Panmunjom was a festering thorn to the CCF (Communist Chinese Forces) and a contradiction to their propaganda that they controlled the entire area about Panmunjom; that the Americans were going to

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their site to plead a truce. They wanted to remove this barb, but were unwilling to pay the price of five thousand casualties. With considerable military cunning they devised a plan whereby they could gain COP 2 and other outposts along the line without paying an exorbitant cost.

COP 2 was only one segment of a battalion sector. There was the Main Line and other outposts, and all were interdependent. The loss of one would weaken the rest, and in certain cases, make the line untenable.

The battalion sector which anchored its left flank on COP 2 had as a right flank bastion the busy, noisy outpost called Bunker. Five hundred yards to the left (west) of Bunker was vulnerable Hedy, with cool and calm Ingrid yet another five hundred meters to the west. The Chinese command had a desire for Hedy too, because much of the main line would have to be abandoned in that sector if it were to come under their control.

Due to the topography, however, Ingrid could halt or hinder any large attack on Hedy because the CCF must make their approach through an area known as Hedy's Crotch. The Marines on Ingrid could take enemy troops moving into the crotch under heavy, flanking fire. Aware of this, the Chinese resorted to trickery to gain Hedy as they were doing in the case of COP 2.

By using the No Fire Circle of Panmunjom as a shield, they would *dig* around COP 2 and cut the road to the corridor. This narrow, rutty affair was the only way to supply the garrison. Once isolated, the outpost would fall from lack of food, water and ammunition. In a siege, water would be of prime importance for there were no natural sources or storage facilities.

To cut this road and isolate the garrison, the Chinese began OPERATION DIG. Gathering together a horde of their best pick and shovel wielders, these human moles began to shovel south from the village of Kamon-Dong. In frustration and with anxiety, the Marines watched this trench line spread like

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an uncoiling snake and there was little they could do to delay or hinder the enemy. In addition to digging, the enemy was in the habit of giving vent to their hate by a sporadic, though fairly heavy, mortar fire from Kamon-Dong. This fire could not be answered by the Marines for fear of dropping a shell in the circle. The Marines were sure the village was also the storage supply base for the sector.

At this juncture the 1st Battalion 5th Marines, commanded by Lt. Col. Alexander Gentleman, occupied the Bunker-COP 2 sector. This creeping, digging type of enemy offensive, though slow, could be deadly and Gentleman knew something had to be done to stop it. When observers reported a deep trench through which hand carts of supplies were being moved from Kamon-Dong to outlying points, the Marine commander took action.

Gentleman made a reconnaissance with Lt. Eric Pedersen, who commanded the Recoilless Rifle Platoon. The Recoilless Rifle is a specialized weapon. It is an artillery piece without wheels; it is an antitank weapon; it can be carried by four men, three if they're willing and able. It can throw a 75 mm. shell several thousand yards with precision. In the vernacular of the troops, the weapon is called a "reckless" rifle. This name stems partly from a contraction of its true name and partly from the fact that one has to be a little on the reckless side to associate with such a weapon. Due to the horrific back blast, it is impossible to conceal its firing position and the enemy is committed to taking instant counteraction.

It was decided to set up a Recoilless weapon at the confluence of the neutral corridor and the No Fire Circle. From this position the gun could fire into Kamon-Dong and the trench works without danger of violating the sanctity of the corridor or the circle. At the same time, it would be virtually impossible for the enemy to return the fire without dropping a shell into the circle or onto the corridor.

As soon as Gentleman and Pedersen came to a decision, the younger officer guided a gun squad into position. The circle was

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three yards to the left and the corridor three to the rear. Cox sighted in on the first house to the right of Kamon-Dong. The range was five hundred meters. The first shot had little apparent effect. On the second shot a haze of yellow dust blossomed; on the third, the roof fell in and figures were seen pouring from the buildings. Methodically, Cox went about the task of knocking down the mud huts, one by one, from right to left.

The supply of ammunition for the rifle came from an ASP (Ammunition Supply Point) on COP 2. Although ammunition could have been hauled by jeep to within a few yards of the gun by using the corridor, this was against the rules. This meant the carriers in the squad had to man-pack the 75 mm. rounds a distance of nine hundred meters.

It was a panting job for the ammunition carriers. PFC Coleman, six foot three and weighing over two hundred, could shoulder the one hundred eight pound load with more ease and speed than could his mate, PFC Jose Cordova. For Cordova the weight of the shells was within thirty pounds of his own.

Then Cox hit pay dirt as one of his shots set off an explosion. The village became covered by dust and smoke and the spectators danced with rage. The Marines unshipped the weapon and carried it into the corridor. Kamon-Dong, for the time, was finished as a supply point.

That night Pedersen asked Gunnery Sergeant Norman Mull, Platoon Sergeant Joe Latham and Scout Sergeant Willard Berry to his tent.

"We need a horse or a mule to pack ammunition." All nodded in agreement. "A horse could carry eight to ten rounds at a faster pace than a man can carry three." Again the men nodded. "I'll see if I can get permission."

Pedersen drove to the 1st Battalion CP where he found Gentleman in the COC Bunker.

"Kamon-Dong is still burning, Pete," the battalion commander greeted him. "That was bloody good shooting today."

"Thank you, Colonel." Pedersen accepted the proffered cup

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of coffee. "Running that ammunition over rice paddies just about whipped the squad though. I'd like to get a horse. Will you back me on it?"

"Sure. I'll do more than that. I'll let you borrow a one-ton trailer to haul it around. But where are you going to get a horse?"

"I thought I'd go to the race track in Seoul. There ought to be some horses for sale around there."

Early the following morning Corporal Philip Carter drove his jeep with borrowed trailer attached, to Pedersen's tent. Pedersen and Scout Sgt. Willard Berry were waiting.

The road ran past burned-out hamlets, broken houses, flattened orchards, barren paddies, all sadly ruined by war. Thirty-five miles of jolting and they came to Seoul.

They found the track without difficulty and drove into the stable area. They were greeted by a young, smiling Korean. He spoke English after a fashion. Pedersen made his wants known as other natives gathered.

The Korean asked, "You pay hwan or dooler?"

Pedersen knew it was against regulations to use U.S. currency, but he didn't know where to exchange his money. He answered, "American dollars."

The Korean smiled and led the way to a stall. Pedersen saw a thin, scabious animal with harness sores. He shook his head and moved on. The next horse was better, but not pleasing. A third and fourth followed. At the fifth stall he looked over the half door. Quickly he stepped inside with the voluble Korean at his heels.

The Marine studied the little red filly; he noted her three white stockings, the blaze, the intelligent eyes and fine head. He remembered a horse he had once owned as a youth in Arizona. This was even better, far better.

"How much?"

"How much you pay? This is the best horse in Chosen."

Pedersen made up his mind not to haggle. He said firmly, "I

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will pay two hundred fifty dollars. That is all I have and that is all I will pay.”

He knew he had impressed the man. The fellow turned and shouted. For the first time Pedersen saw a Korean standing some distance from the stall. There was a volley of words back and forth. The guide turned.

“My friend will sell. Please leave the stall for him to say his *sayonara*.”

Balancing herself on the precarious platform of a jeep trailer, Flame rode into a new life. It was dark when the jeep pulled into camp, but the RR Platoon broke out of their tents to greet the recruit. The choice of a companion was important and the young officer had given the matter considerable thought on the ride back from Seoul. He finally decided on PFC Monroe Coleman, a large, soft-spoken youth with a lifetime background of ranch life in Utah. This seemed to fit him to be consort for the little mare.

Pedersen asked Coleman, “How’d you like the job of taking care of her?”

Coleman grinned, “I’d sure like to, sir. I like horses.”

“Good.” Pedersen turned to Platoon Sergeant Latham. “She’ll not be ridden by anyone at any time. In the morning we’ll build a bunker for her.”

Latham, an Alabaman with years’ experience around horses, ran his hand along Flame’s neck. “When I was stationed at Pensacola we had a twelve horse stable for base patrol.”

“Okay, Joe, you’re the D.I. Put her through boot camp.”

“What’s her name?”

“I don’t know—”

From the darkness a voice said, “Reckless. Let’s call her Reckless.”

There was immediate approval. No horse feed being available, Reckless was taken to the mess tent. Her first Marine meal consisted of a loaf of bread and uncooked oatmeal.

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CHAPTER II

THE RECOILLESS Rifle Platoon had established its camp south of Changdan, the site of the battalion command post, and facing on the road leading to the corridor. The day following Flame's arrival was a busy one. Besides fulfilling their commitments for fire missions on the front, there was a bunker to build and horse feed to be purchased. The Chinese appeared to be stunned by the unexpected bombardment of Kamondong, which was still burning, and there were no calls for more shelling from Gentleman. The rest of the front was quiet, so Pedersen was free to make arrangements for his recruit.

The platoon turned to, to build a bunker and fence in a small pasture. While this was going on, Latham went south of the Imjim to buy feed. A shoebrush was dug out of a sea bag and the little horse was thoroughly gone over. There were many volunteer hands to supplement Coleman's and her coat took on the sheen of a Marine dress boot. The shoe polish on the brush may have added to the luster.

Flame accepted the new surroundings and many hands calmly. She had never had so much food nor such a varied diet. For the first time in her life she ate an apple—many of them. Carrots also were new. And her mouth salivated over her first Hershey bar. That afternoon when the wire was up and Coleman turned her loose, she romped in sheer exuberance from so much attention and food.

Latham was hindered in his recruit training program until the pack saddle which Pedersen had written his wife to ship had arrived from California. While waiting, there were things that could be done. There was the daily practice of getting into and out of a trailer. In no time she became as nimble as any Marine going on a liberty run. There were walks in the hills and the teaching of caution on coming to wire. She showed a sensitivity

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to barbed wire and her passage through it was never without fear.

When Latham and the recruit had become thoroughly acquainted and a close bond established, the training became more detailed. Latham taught her to lie down. He also taught her to kneel in case sometime it might be necessary for her to crawl into a shallow bunker. Never in his fourteen years in the Corps had Latham worked so diligently with a recruit.

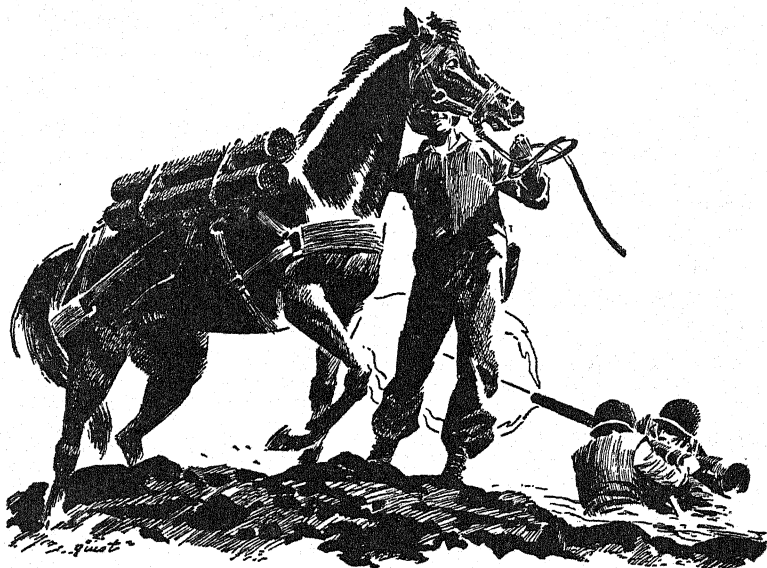
When the pack saddle arrived, serious work began. After experimenting and making certain adaptations, it was found that six rounds were the simplest load to secure. That number did not appear to burden Reckless unduly. With adjustments, eight and ten rounds could be carried, but Pedersen ruled such a load would only be carried in the most urgent situations. Reckless accepted the pack and load without qualm or protest and appeared to delight in roaming the hills with her friends on trial runs.

The platoon was assigned a fire mission into Hedy's Crotch. The company facing on this sector had detected trenches being dug. The Recoilless Rifles would delay the enemy building program. It was decided that Reckless was ready for her baptism of fire.

The distance from Changdan to the shooting site was two and a half miles. The first portion of the way was shielded by the spine of hills which run eastward from Hill 229. At the destroyed hamlet of Kwakchon a turn to the north led onto a road that was narrow and rutted. A portion of this was navigable. The final five hundred yards to the ridge line was a steep, breathtaking drag on foot.

Pedersen spaced his vehicles at ten minute intervals so as not to alarm the trigger-fingered enemy. The first vehicle carried the weapon and the squad, the next bore Reckless and her trailer, while the last brought the ammunition. The passage of the exposed road was made without incident. Sergeant

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Ralph Sherman and his gun crew began the stiff climb with the heavy weapon.

Reckless scrambled from the trailer and nudged Latham for a piece of chocolate.

"No pogy bait 'til this is over," he told her. Six rounds of high explosive (HE) were secured to the pack and Latham gave her a slap of encouragement. "Okay, Reckless, we'll soon know if you're a Marine or a mouse."

"She ain't going to get shook, Sarge," Coleman promised. He took the lead rope in hand and began the climb. They soon overtook the gun crew. Sherman directed Coleman to off-load at the first firing position and to return to the truck for another load. Pedersen and Berry had preceded the party and were on the ridge line searching out targets with the infantry commander.

Speed and teamwork were the key to a successful shoot. It was breathless, scrambling work over the difficult terrain and

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in the excitement of the moment the little red horse was forgotten. Coleman had delivered his first load and was returning with the second when Sherman opened fire.

"Wham-whoosh!" the hills bellowed and rocketed with the roar. Behind the weapon spurted a flume of dust. Though weighted down with six shells, Reckless left the ground with all four feet . . . her eyes went white.

"Take it easy, Reckless," Coleman begged.

"Wham-whoosh!" Sherman was on target and driving them home.

Reckless went into the air again, but not quite so far. More soft talk from Coleman. She snorted and shook her head to stop the ringing in her ears.

"Wham-whoosh!"

She shook as the concussive blast of air struck her, but she did not rear. She stood closer to Coleman, trembling slightly, but the white was gone from her eyes. She began to take an interest in the actions of the gun crew.

"Wham-whoosh!" Her reaction was little more than a jerk of her head.

"Let's go!" Guido, the section leader, shouted. It was time to displace the weapon.

With the precision of a professional quarterback, Sherman directed his gun crew. The shift to the new position was made with Reckless and Coleman at their heels. The six rounds she carried were off-loaded and down the steep hill the pair went for another load.

Five times Reckless and Coleman negotiated the rugged hillside with ammunition. During the last series of shots she stood a short distance from the gun picking around in the sparse grass for something edible.

Reckless rode back to camp in high style. Because the day had turned warm and the hill was so steep, Latham offered her a can of beer. She drank it and asked for more. She was one of them. She was a Marine who had been under enemy fire.

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CHAPTER III

THE 5TH MARINES were relieved and moved into positions in division reserve. It grew colder and there was snow, but not nearly so much as the winter before when the Marines had been on the eastern front. Reckless grew a heavier coat and it came out more chestnut than sorrel. While there was no ammunition to carry, there was a new job of stringing communication wire. With reels of wire on her pack, she could string more telephone wire in a day than ten Marines.

After thirty days in reserve, the 5th Marines moved back into the line. Once again Reckless' regiment would face the enemy, but from a different sector. This time they would move to the east and relieve the 7th Regiment on the battle positions supporting the combat outposts East Berlin, Berlin, Vegas, Reno and Carson with smaller Ava farther to the west.

The 5th Marines were moving onto a battleground which would bring new glories to its colors, but would add many names to the final roll before it was done. And Reckless went to battle with her regiment and performed in a manner to earn the love and esteem of a corps of men to whom bravery is the rule rather than the exception.

The little red horse carried pack load on pack load of equipment into the lines. There were small arms ammunition, grenades, rations, sleeping bags and communication wire to move forward. There was barbed wire for her own pasture.

From the Imjin to the battle positions, the little horse met many Marines of her regiment she had not seen before. Heretofore she had worked mainly with the 1st Battalion. Now she was to live and fight with the 2d. And so she came to know the men of this unit as well as she did those of the 1st. As it turned out, the 2d was to become her favorite and the friends she made in this outfit were to have an important influence on the rest of her life.

Pedersen came to realize, sadly, that he was losing Reckless. She was no longer his, nor did she belong to the platoon. She had become a Marine, adopted by a regiment of Marines. In time, as she became known, she would be the pride of the Division . . . and the Corps. He knew that when he was transferred, as one day he must be, he could not take her with him.

S/Sgt. John Lisenby established firing positions for his gun section on the ridge line fingers and spurs of Hill 120. These sites were east and north of the pasture and overlooked the MLR and from them the rifles could fire in direct support of East Berlin and Berlin, and into enemy held strong points known to Marines as Detroit and Frisco. (It is altogether possible the Chinese called them Canton and Shanghai.) Most important, though, was that Lisenby's weapons could reach out and fire into enemy-held Hills 153 and 190, which faced on Outpost Vegas. When the battle was in doubt, this was to be of prime importance.

Combat Outpost Vegas lay twelve hundred meters in front of the main battle positions. Reno, to the north and west, was fifteen hundred meters from the MLR. The distance between the two was five hundred meters. Carson was eight hundred meters from the line and six hundred southwest of Reno. The three formed an obtuse triangle with Reno at the apex, and they came to be known as the Nevada Complex or the Iron Triangle, and the violent struggle to hold them, the "Battle of Cities."

These positions were named by Marine Lt. Colonel Tony Caputo whose battalion established and first occupied them. Caputo designated them after the Nevada gaming towns because, as he said, "It's a gamble if we can hold them."

This was a sound military observation inasmuch as the enemy line and strong points were on higher ground and looked down on all three. Carson was only four hundred meters from glowering Un-Gok; Reno was but three hundred meters from Hill

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150, which was flanked by 153 to the east. Both of these enemy strongholds were backed up by the mighty Hill 190. Vegas also had 153 and 190 to contend with.

The numbers of these hills indicate their elevation and can be compared with Reno at 143 and Vegas a squatty 139. Despite the apparent hazard of occupying positions so near the enemy lines, the Marines were forced to it by the dictates of terrain. Reno, Vegas and Carson held the key to the city of Seoul.

It was known to the Marines that the Chinese could take any one or all three of these outposts if they were willing to pay the price. With most commanders, the cost would have been militarily unprofitable, but the ruthless Communist leaders ordered the assault. The battle for the Nevada Complex was joined and for a period of seventy-two hours reached a bloody crescendo seldom matched in warfare.

The night of March 26, 1953, the enemy began his preparatory bombardment. Heavy mortar and artillery fire blanketed the MLR. The heaviest fire of all was on the three outposts. As night came on the sight of it was terrifying. The flashing eruptions ran the ridge lines and cascaded into the valleys and the sound of it was that of twenty tornadoes tearing at a countryside.

Throughout the night fighting of the heaviest, most violent sort developed in and around the Nevada Complex. By midnight the initial stage of the battle had gone to the enemy. Reno and Vegas were lost and the fate of the Marines manning the positions was unknown. Carson had held after being put to a severe strain. Reinforcing units sent along the Reno "rope" became heavily involved with superior enemy forces and were halted short of their objective. A similar setback met the unit dispatched to aid the Vegas garrison.

At 2:00 o'clock in the morning Colonel Lew Walt, new commander of the 5th Marines, was forced to a fateful decision. He requested permission to withdraw all troops to the rear of the

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MLR, to reorganize and launch a coordinated attack to retake Reno and Vegas during daylight. The remaining hours of darkness would be used to evacuate the wounded and dead.

Walt's request was granted.

It was still dark that morning when Coleman made his way from the bunker to the pasture. The enemy incoming had fallen away to sporadic fire as the Chinese worked to consolidate positions gained during the night and save ammunition for the expected counterattack. Marine artillery and heavy mortars continued to fire on assembly areas and routes of approach the enemy would use to reinforce Reno and Vegas. As friendly shells sped overhead they filled the night air with a rasping whizzpp-whizzpp-whizzpp. Their final rasp would die for a moment to be followed by the crash of distant thunder. Then there was the occasional shell with a loose or imperfect rotating band, that sounded like a thousand angry hornets.

The normal whizzpp fretted Reckless, but the unusual hornet-nest sound brought sweat to her flanks and neck. Coleman talked to her and tried to get her to eat a feeding of barley, but she would no more than nibble at it.

They left the pasture and took the trail to the Ammunition Supply Point. Once away from the flatlands of the paddy pasture they were walking through walls of shadows from the shallow hills nearby. They met Lively and his gun crew moving quietly in the opposite direction.

Lively told Coleman, "Latham is waiting for you at the ASP. He'll help you load on the first few trips."

Lively went on into the darkness with his squad in file behind him. Coleman and Reckless continued westward. They climbed over the sharp finger and Coleman was beginning to sweat under his flak jacket. He slipped the rifle from his shoulder and slung it over the forward crosstree of the pack. They went on. In the darkness it was a tight scramble to the ridge that masked the supply point from the enemy.

On the top they paused for a breather and the wind from

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the northwest was fresh and whipping strong. In the darkness the descent was steep and the trail uncertain. Coleman fell and a rock tore through his utility trousers and woolen underwear. His knee bled. Ahead of him he could hear Reckless slithering downward with all four feet breaking her progress. When he got to the bottom she was waiting with Latham.

"Break out plenty of smoke," Latham directed the ammunition handlers. "We're the only ones who've got plenty of it. We'll start her out with eight rounds. See how she handles that load. Make each load six smoke and two HE."

The canisters were laced to the pack and Latham, with a slap of encouragement, turned Reckless to the first test. She took a deep breath, pricked her ears sharply forward and charged the hill. As Latham and Coleman scrambled upwards behind her they were met with a small avalanche of rocks and dirt she had kicked loose.

Breathing heavily, they gained the ridge line. Reckless saw them coming and started down the far side. They had to press their pace to keep up with her. It was easier for all on the trail skirting the paddy before the sweat-letting surge over the finger. Off the finger, the two Marines thought she might turn into the pasture, but she kept to the trail.

The first light of dawn was lightening the sky behind Hill 120 as Reckless came to the approaches leading to it. She knew what faced her and without a word of urging broke into a trot and then a gallop. The ammunition canisters bounced and banged and Latham was fearful the bindings would break. With a load of nearly two hundred pounds she gained speed slowly, but hit the sharp rise at a run. The incline was a forty-five degree angle with two hundred fifty feet of turning, twisting trail before the first restful spur was reached. Her flanks were still heaving and there was a rim of lather under the breeching when Latham gained her side.

At the beginning of the day the recoilless rifles had a small supply of shells in the vicinity of each firing position. Reckless began the day working against this backlog. Her efforts were

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augmented by members of the squad who were packing three rounds a trip. As the day wore on, time and terrain began to take their toll of Marine-packers and the little horse was making two trips for each of her friends.

As the hour for the counterattack approached, every weapon at the command of the Marines was turned to the task of supporting the infantry. Smoke shells began to blossom and drift down wind. Lisenby's gun crews began pumping two smoke shells a minute onto the slopes ahead of the advancing infantry. A gray fog grew and drifted southward. In the draws the smoke held well and provided cover, but in the open the wind caught it up and dispersed it.

The enemy, aware the attack was forming, began a heavy counterfire. Pedersen roamed the hillside with his binoculars, seeking enemy gun and mortar positions. When such a site was discovered, he would direct Lively to take it under fire. Except for the tanks, the recoilless rifles were the only weapons where the gunners could see the target, whereas the artillery and heavy mortars were dependent on forward observers. Because of this Pedersen's guns could fire on targets directly in front of friendly troops.

Targets were plentiful and with the constant planting of smoke shells the backlog of ammunition dwindled until the gun crews were loading directly from Reckless' pack. Latham increased her load to eight rounds and watched with concern as she climbed the steep hillside.

During the day Reckless made fifty-one trips from the ASP to various gun positions. She carried three hundred eighty-six rounds . . . more than nine thousand pounds of explosives. Pedersen estimated the distance she traveled to exceed thirty-five miles.

She stumbled and her head hung low as she came off the hill for the last time in the cool darkness. She walked in a file with the section and the Marines talked to her and told her what a great little horse she was. A few meters across the line

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the battle still raged and a jigsaw pattern of tracer bullets laced the darkness.

Reckless paid scant heed to this roar of battle as she appeared to sleep-walk the trail with her friends. Her pace quickened a bit when they turned off the trail and into the pasture. While she ate a generous helping of grain, Latham and Coleman rubbed her down. When she was through with the grain, Latham let her drink and then piled fresh straw deep on the bunker floor. It took considerable coaxing, but he got her to lie down as he had taught her at Changdan. He left her covered with a blanket.

During the night a supply train got through to Carson which assured the successful defense of this outpost. Plans were laid for the continuation of the attack on Vegas and the neutralization by fire of Reno. Now that it was known the Marines had been removed, the heaviest weapons would be turned on both objectives.

Before daylight Lisenby's section was moving along the trail toward their gun positions. Coleman found Reckless gaunt and hungry. It could be seen that the day before had melted many pounds from her small frame. While she dug into an oversized meal of barley, Coleman rubbed her down. She accepted the pack without protest, but when they struck off toward the ASP Coleman noticed she was stiff-gaited.

Latham waited for them at the ASP and examined her legs and feet with care. Coleman told him about her obvious soreness.

"She's gimpy from overwork, Coleman. She should work out of it when she gets warmed up."

Latham's prognosis was correct. By the end of the first trip she moved along freely. Her battle attitude was altogether different on this second day as well. The day before seemed to have given her a fatalistic approach to her life with Marines. No longer did she become skittish over unusual noises and now

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her sweating was normal because of hill climbing and not excessive from worry.

As Lively was to report, "A round of Willie Peter landed about thirty yards from her and she didn't even look around at it."

It was well she had become accustomed to war for this second day of the battle for Vegas was to bring a cannonading and bombing seldom experienced in warfare. In denying Reno to the enemy by fire the heaviest shells and one thousand pound bombs completely erased the crest. Later in the morning twenty-eight tons of bombs and hundreds of the largest shells turned the crest of Vegas into a smoking, death-pocked rubble. Reckless shivered under the shock of the concussion, but it was a muscular reaction rather than from nerves.

Easy Company of the 5th Marines came back to the battle and in a valiant sweep upwards gained the hill. The Reckless Rifles aided materially in this final drive by firing directly into the trenches ahead of the attacking infantry. Another night and day of heavy fighting repulsed counterattack after counterattack until the Chinese command had expended two regiments. Even they could not afford to pay a higher price.

The Battle of Vegas was over and within a short time the Marines were relieved by the Turkish Brigade. For the first time in many months the 1st Marine Division was to leave the line for a rest.

CHAPTER IV

WHEN THE truce was signed, the Second Battalion took up new positions from the Panmunjom corridor to the Imjin River. Reckless and her platoon moved with the Second and made a comfortable camp in a shallow-hilled valley not far from an abandoned ferry crossing site. The approach to the river at this point was gentle and the shore was black sand. Reckless spent her days in the hills stringing communication

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wire to new positions. It was an easy life for the most part and she put on weight.

During this period the commanding officer of the Second would invite Reckless, Lt. Bill Riley, who had taken Pedersen's place when he was relieved, and Latham to his bunker overlooking the Imjin to sit out the cool of the evening and talk about her. With notebook in hand, the older officer wrote page after page as Latham and Riley talked. It was at one of these meetings plans were discussed about her trip to the States.

In October Latham received orders to return to the United States, as did Coleman. In the meantime Master Sgt. John Strange, now the senior NCO in the AT Company, felt Reckless had been neglected and had gone too long without receiving official and public recognition of her services. Captain Andrew Kovach agreed. She should be promoted to sergeant and her acts of courage read aloud during a company formation. First, though, she must have a distinctive uniform. Kovach designed a blanket and turned it over to the platoon for comment and criticism. After a few minor changes, Lt. Herbert Loui drove into Seoul where he found a Korean tailor who would do the job.

The parade blanket was to be of red silk trimmed in gold. There was to be a Globe and Anchor on either side and the proper unit identification.

All was now in readiness for the ceremony. Kovach so informed Col. Elby Martin, then commanding the 5th Marines. Would he and the General come to the AT area to present Reckless with sergeant's stripes? Of course! Martin arranged a date with the General and the unit began a spit and polish program to ready themselves, Reckless and the area for such a ceremony. A small reviewing stand was built, the citation was written and the national and Marine Corps colors borrowed from regiment.

It was a colorful, impressive ceremony. With the company paraded, the General trooped the line and was then conducted

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to the platform. Lively and T/Sgt. Dave Woods escorted Reckless to proper position and Strange read the citation:

For meritorious achievement in connection with operations against the enemy while serving with a Marine infantry regiment in Korea from October 26, 1952 to July 27, 1953. Corporal Reckless performed the duties of ammunition carrier in a superb manner. Reckless' attention and devotion to duty make her well qualified for promotion to the rank of sergeant. . . .

General Pate pinned the stripes to the new blanket and Reckless became a sergeant in the Marine Corps.

Early in December the battalion commander returned from Kimpo to visit the Second and to say good-bye to Reckless. He had some pointed remarks to make to those concerned over the condition of her quarters and lack of attention to her feet. The situation was corrected with promptness.

Shortly after his return to the United States he had lunch with Ben Hibbs, editor of *The Saturday Evening Post*, and Reckless was discussed in detail. Hibbs asked that an article be prepared for *The Post*. This was done and the piece was scheduled for the April 17, 1954, issue.

At this time a letter was written to Colonel Victor "Brute" Krulak, staff secretary to the Commandant of the Marine Corps. The proposal was made to return Reckless to the States and to assign her to permanent duty at Camp Pendleton. The Brute was asked to intercede in her behalf at Headquarters.

With his usual energy and good nature, Krulak went to work on the problem. An answer came from Washington by return mail:

I was delighted to receive your letter and will take up the questions in order.

First, as to the RECKLESS story in *The Saturday Evening Post*. I not only read it, but enjoyed it tremendously. It was warm and most convincing; beautifully done and sensitive.

Be assured that I will commence investigation at once concerning the possibility of having Reckless returned. I have not the slightest idea what problems will be encountered, but will talk to Admiral Denebrink, who runs MSTs, which agency I

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There were stumbling blocks and time lags, but eventually the red tape was cleared away.

As soon as it was known that Reckless was to sail for the States aboard the *Pacific Transport*, Pedersen and Lively responded that they would be in San Francisco to meet her with a trailer to carry her back to Camp Pendleton, home of the 1st Marine Division. Coleman, now out of the Corps, wrote he would drive to the coast from Utah.

It is said by some who know horses that they have little intelligence and no memory—but these detractors had never met Reckless. When the Marines appeared on the hatch they found her straining over the crossbar of the stall. She nodded to Lively, Coleman and Pedersen in turn. It was apparent to anyone who witnessed the meeting that she knew them and was delighted to see them again. It was a scene to be remembered and all were sorry that it was impossible for Latham, then stationed in North Carolina, to be there.

Shortly after daylight the Marines were back aboard preparing her for the photographers. Her feet were cleaned and the hoofs polished and the three white stockings and blaze washed with shampoo.

Reckless was then ready to meet the press. By this time the ship was crowded with photographers and reporters.

As one veteran newsman observed, "She has more cameras and reporters to meet her than Vice-President Nixon had a week ago when he came to town."

Reckless appeared to enjoy it. She posed with various Marines, she ate carrots, she walked into and out of her stall a dozen times while flash bulbs popped and cameramen shouted for different poses. Then she became bored and let Pedersen know it. She was placed in an unloading stall and with Pedersen at her head, the winch swung her over the side and lowered her to the dock.

The newsreel and TV cameramen were entranced with such a beautifully poised subject. Later in the day they met with her on the stage of the Marines' Memorial Club where she was toasted and, in turn, toasted many new friends with cola.

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There were some who doubted her behavior in the elevator which she would have to ride to gain the tenth floor banquet hall. She confounded her skeptics in San Francisco as she had in Korea. She rode the elevator as though she owned it. She walked into a banquet hall where four hundred people waited for her and flash bulbs popped like mortar shells along the MLR. She stood at the head table and ate cake.

Still later she appeared in the ballroom for the official cake cutting ceremony. As is traditional in the Marine Corps, the first slice was given to the most honored Marine present. In this instance there was no one to dispute her right. She was the belle of the ball and it was after midnight before Lively and Pedersen escorted her to her quarters on Pier Seven.

The next day was equally busy. In the morning she was taken to the San Francisco Cow Palace to have a run. She put on one of her greatest performances . . . the rocking horse strut, the whirling run, the charge at Pedersen as though to run him down, the stiff-legged bucking action.

That afternoon she went to the exclusive Bohemian Club to meet the membership. It was a Thursday and the Cartoon Room was crowded when she made her entrance. It was the first time in the long history of the club that a lady had been admitted to the clubrooms. After a pleasant time, she and Lively and Pedersen said good-by to the battalion commander and departed for Camp Pendleton.

Major General John Taylor Selden, commanding general of Camp Pendleton, said of her reception:

I was at the main entrance to meet Sergeant Reckless. She is every bit as beautiful and well trained as I had been told. . . .

After she met the guard, we drove to the Ranch House where she met Mrs. Selden. It was a case of love at first sight for both. We had Reckless make her mark in the guest book—and if it hadn't been for Lt. Pedersen, she would have eaten the pen.

As for her future, I can assure that there are twenty-five thousand Marines on this base who are determined she will wait for nothing—ever. When the 1st Marine Division returns from Korea that number will be doubled. Need I say more?

THE TREE OF MAN

A NOVEL BY
PATRICK WHITE

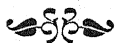


AN ABRIDGEMENT

The Author

PATRICK WHITE was born in London and brought up in New South Wales, Australia, where his father owned a sheep and cattle station. During the war he was with the R.A.F. and he has traveled extensively in Europe and the United States. Mr. White's previous books are *Happy Valley*, *The Living and the Dead* and *The Aunt's Story*.

THE TREE OF MAN—Patrick White
Published by The Viking Press, Inc.
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Chapter I

A CART drove between the two big stringybarks and stopped. These were the dominant trees in that part of the bush, rising above the involved scrub with the simplicity of true grandeur. So the cart stopped, grazing the hairy side of a tree, and the man who sat in the cart got down.

He rubbed his hands together, because already it was cold, a curdle of cold cloud in a pale sky, and copper in the west. As the man rubbed his hands, the friction of cold skin intensified the coldness of the air and the solitude of that place. Birds looked from twigs, and the eyes of animals were drawn to what was happening. The man lifting a bundle from a cart. A dog lifting his leg on an anthill. The lip drooping on the sweaty horse.

Then the man took an axe and struck at the side of a hairy tree, more to hear the sound than for any other reason. And the sound was cold and loud. The man struck at the tree, and struck, till several white chips had fallen. He looked at the scar in the side of the tree. The silence was immense. It was the first time anything like this had happened in that part of the bush.

More quickly then, as if deliberately breaking with a dream, he took the harness from the horse, leaving a black pattern of sweat. He hobbled the strong fetlocks of the cobby little horse and stuck the nosebag on his bald face. The man made a lean-to with bags and a few saplings. He built a fire. He sighed at last, because the lighting of his small fire had kindled in him the first warmth of content. Of being somewhere. That particular part of the bush had been made his by the entwining fire. It licked at and swallowed the loneliness.

By this time also the red dog had come and sat at the fire, near, though not beside the man, who was not intimate with his animals. He did not touch or address them. It was enough for them to be there, at a decent distance. So the dog sat.

All around, the bush was disappearing. In that light of late

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evening, under the white sky, the black limbs of trees, the black and brooding scrub, were being folded into one. Only the fire held out.

The man was a young man. Life had not yet operated on his face. He was good to look at; also, it would seem, good. Because he had nothing to hide, he did perhaps appear to have forfeited a little of his strength. But that is the irony of honesty.

The name of this man was Stan Parker.

While he was still unborn his mother had thought she would like to call him Ebenezer, but he was spared this because his father, an obscene man, with hair on his stomach, had laughed. So the mother thought no more about it. She was a humourless and rather frightened woman. When the time came she called her boy Stanley, which was, after all, a respectable sort of a name. She remembered also the explorer, of whom she had read.

The boy's mother had read a lot, through frail gold-rimmed spectacles. She had begun to read in the beginning as a protection from the frightening and unpleasant things. She continued because, apart from the story, literature brought with it a kind of gentility for which she craved. Then she became a teacher. All this before she married. The woman's name was Noakes. By some mistake or fascination, she had married Ned Parker, the blacksmith at Willow Creek, who got drunk regular, and who could twist a piece of iron into a true lover's knot.

"Stan," said his mother once, "you must promise to love God, and never to touch a drop."

"Yes," said the boy, for he had had experience of neither, and the sun was in his eyes.

In the drowsy bosom of the fire that he had made the young man remembered his parents and his mother's God, who was a pale-blue gentleness. He had tried to see her God, in actual feature, but he had not. Now, Lord, he had said, lying with his eyes open in the dark. Sometimes he would hear his father, swearing and belching, the other side of the door.

His father did not deny God. On the contrary. He was the blacksmith, and had looked into the fire. He smote the anvil, and the sparks flew.

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The God of Parker the father, the boy saw, was essentially a fiery God, a gusty God, accusing with a horny finger. He was a God of the Prophets. And, if anything, this was the God that the boy himself suspected and feared rather than his mother's gentleness. Anyway, in the beginning. At Willow Creek, God bent the trees till they streamed in the wind like beards, He rained upon the tin roofs till even elders grew thoughtful, and smaller, and yellower, by the light of smoking lamps, and He cut the throat of old Joe Skinner, who was nothing to deserve it, not that anyone knew of.

This was one of the things, the young man remembered, his mother had not attempted to explain. "It is one of those things that happen," she said.

So the mother looked upset and turned away. There were many things to which she did not have the answers. For this reason she did not go much with the other women, who knew, most of them, most things, and if they didn't, it wasn't worth knowing. So the mother of Stan Parker was alone. She continued to read. She read, and she practiced neatness, as if she might tidy things up that way; only time and moth destroyed her efforts, and the souls of human beings, which will burst out of any box they are put inside.

There was the young man her son, for instance. Ah, she had said, he will be a teacher, or a preacher, he will teach the words of the poets and God. With her respect for these, she suspected, in all twilight and good faith, that they might be interpreted. But to the son, who had read the play of *Hamlet* in his mother's Shakespeare, and of the Old Testament those passages in which men emerged from words, there seemed no question of interpretation. Anyway, not yet.

He was no interpreter. He shifted beside his fire at the suggestion that he might have been. He was nothing much. He was a man. So far he had succeeded in filling his belly. So far, mystery was not his personal concern, doubts were still faint echoes.

He was neither a preacher nor a teacher, as his mother had hoped he might still become, almost up to the moment when they put her under the yellow grass at the bend in Willow Creek.

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He had tried his hand at this and that. He had driven a mob of skeleton sheep, and a mob of chafing, satin cattle; he had sunk a well in solid rock, and built a house, and killed a pig; he had weighed out the sugar in a country store, and cobbled shoes, and ground knives. But he had not continued to do any of these things for long, because he knew that it was not intended.

"Why, Stan, you are a man now," said his mother once, when he walked in across the creaking board in the doorway of their house at Willow Creek and caught her going through the things in a drawer.

It was as if she had come out of herself for the first time in years, to take surprised notice.

They were both awkward for a while.

Then Stan Parker knew by his mother's shoulders and the gristle in her neck that she would die soon. There was, too, a smell of old letters in the room.

She began to talk of money in the bank. "And there's that land that was your father's, in the hills back from here, I don't just know the name, I don't think it ever had one, people always called it Parkers' when they spoke. Well, there is this land. Your father did not think much of it. The land was always uncleared. Scrubby, he said. Though the soil is good in patches. When the country opens up it will perhaps be worth a little. The railway is a wonderful invention, and, of course, assistance to the land-owner. So keep this property, Stan," she said, "it's safe."

Mrs. Parker's voice had been scrubbed clean of the emotions. It was bare and very dull.

But the young man's breath thickened, his heart tolled against his ribs—was it for a liberation or imprisonment? He did not know. Only that this scrubby, anonymous land was about to become his, and that his life was taking shape for the first time.

"Yes, Mother," he said.

Not long after that she died, and he touched her cold hands, and buried her, and went away.

Some people said that young Stan Parker had no feelings, but it was just that he had not known her very well.

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Nobody took much notice when the young man left for good, in a cart that he had bought from Alby Veitch. Soon there would be no reason to remember Parkers in that place. Because the present prevails.

Stan Parker drove on, through mud and over stones, towards those hills in which his land lay. All that day they rattled and bumped, the sides of the sturdy horse grown sleeker in sweat. Under the cart a red dog lolloped loosely along. His pink tongue, enormous with distance, swept the ground.

So they reached their destination, and ate, and slept, and in the morning of frost, beside the ashes of a fire, were faced with the prospect of leading some kind of life. Of making that life purposeful. Of opposing silence and rock and tree.

Many days passed in this way, the man clearing his land. The muscular horse, shaking his untouched forelock, tautened the chain traces and made logs move. The man hewed and burned, burned and hewed. At night he lay on the heap of sacks and leaves, on the now soft and tranquil earth.

There in the scarred bush, that had not yet accepted its changed face, the man began to build a house. He brought the slabs he had shaped for logs. Slowly. He piled his matchsticks. So the days were piled too.

The house was more the symbol of a house. Its prim, slab walls fulfilled necessity. There were windows to let the light into the oblong room, there was a tin chimney, shaped like a matchbox, through which the smoke came at last. Finally he stuck on a veranda. Seen through the trees, it was a plain but honest house that the man had built.

If there had been neighbours, it would have been a comfort to see the smoke occur regularly in the matchbox-chimney. But there were no neighbours. Only sometimes, if you listened on the stiller days, you might hear the sound of an axe, like the throb of your own heart, in the blue distance. Only very distant. Or more distantly, a cock. Or imagination. It was too far.

Sometimes the man would drive off into that distance in his

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high cart. Then the clearing was full of the whinge and yelping of the red dog, left chained to a veranda post.

The man always brought back things in his cart. He brought a scratched table and chairs. He brought an iron bed, and all those necessities, like flour, and a bottle of pain killer, and pickled meat, and kerosene, and seed potatoes, and a packet of needles, and tea and sugar.

The dog's collar almost carved off his neck when the man came, and there was always the joy and excitement and the smell of brought things.

Then, once, when the man had been gone some time, longer than normal perhaps, he brought with him a woman, who sat beside him in the cart, holding the board and her flat hat. When she had got down, the dog, loosed from his chain, craned forward, still uncertain of his freedom, on trembling toes, in silence, and smelled the hem of her skirt.

Down along the coast there was a township of Yuruga, to which Stan Parker had paid visits, to a cousin of his mother's called Clarence Bott. Already as a boy in large boots he had known that town, and had, in fact, worked near Yuruga for a few months, on a dairy farm.

It was as a young man, rather, that Stan Parker had paid the visits to his mother's cousin Clarrie, the draper. The draper had three rollicking girls, Alice, Clara, and Lilian, who had all three put up their hair and were taking an interest about the time Stan Parker had become interesting. Not that it was intended any of the Bott girls should marry the blacksmith's son, himself with hard hands and a shack somewhere in the hills. Oh dear, no. But the Bott girls were taut with interest as they waited to repulse their Cousin Stan.

But the young man did not propose to or even attempt to kiss his cousins. Why he did not, it is difficult to say. He was backward or something. Consequently he became a bitter subject in the Bott household. Particularly when, on almost his last visit, he broke the corner off the marble washstand in the best room. At once it was confirmed that Stan Parker had been designed to do

the wrong thing, and they should never in their senses have expected anything else from the blacksmith's son.

The evening Stan Parker broke the washstand was the evening of a dance in a hall to raise church funds. Such an act on such an occasion should have shaken Stan, but he kicked the marble into a corner, as if it had been tin or wood. His mind was quite steady, and the window of his room, he saw, was full of stars.

All that night the fiddle could not have been more watchful that sawed the waltzes up and down. The grave face of the young man sitting in conflicting clothes followed the logic of the lancers. He was not surprised. Their golden patterns merged and opened. The giggles flowered on the faces of girls. The young man's deep eyes protected him from any who might have struck. He was quite defenceless. But nobody dared.

Then, after a time, when it looked as though he might almost fathom the figures of the dance, after he had sighed and crossed the hot serge of his legs, the parson's wife came across, leaving beside him a thin girl.

"This is the first ball I have ever been to," said the girl.

Her hands, which were less elegant than those of Alice, Clara, and Lilian Bott, picked at pieces of her blue dress. This was obviously too big, and had, in fact, been lent by Mrs. Erbey, the parson's wife, from a box in which it had been put away.

They looked at each other, under the sea of music.

"Don't you dance?" she asked.

"No," he said.

She was about to confess, what suddenly she would not tell. Courage had made her craftier. Instead her face embarked on a little smile.

"It is just as much fun to watch. What is your name?" she asked.

"Stan Parker," he said.

The whole room was filling, and filling, with music and the laughter of dancers, so that it was difficult to hear the obvious question, but she knew that this had been asked in turn.

"Mine?" laughed her thin mouth.

Then she bent her head and quickly scribbled on the piece of

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paper with the little pencil that Mrs. Erbey had given her that evening to note the partners she would not have.

He saw the eyelids on her lowered face grow dark, and the shadows beneath the bones of her cheeks.

"There," she laughed shortly.

"*Amy Victoria Fibbens?*" he read in a slow voice. "You one of those Fibbens from Kellys' Corner?"

"Yes," she said. "But I'm not one of those really. My mother and father is dead. I'm an orphan, see? And I live with Uncle and Aunt, who are those Fibbens at Kellys' Corner."

Her blue dress was quite anxious, and the narrow sash that had been tied too many times.

"Go on," said Stan Parker. "Now I remember."

Which made it worse.

Because he remembered the shed at Kellys' Corner. He remembered the kids playing in the rain. There was a mob of Fibbens kids, and when they walked out they walked in a string, their bare feet kicking dust or slapping mud. He remembered this girl, and the string of Fibbens kids that walked behind.

"What do you remember?" she asked, trying to see it in his face.

"You," he said. "I dunno there was anything else."

Amy Fibbens had not got great affection for her uncle or her aunt. She had not yet felt affection for any human being, except in a respectful and unsatisfactory way for Mrs. Erbey, the parson's wife, whom she went to help by day when she had turned sixteen. There her life was not so different from what it was in the Fibbens shed. She wiped the noses of a string of children. She stirred the morning pan of porridge. But she also ate the remains of puddings. And she did wear shoes.

So she was fond of Mrs. Erbey. But Amy had not yet been loved, except by her mother, fretfully, for a short time before she died. The thin girl did expect something to happen eventually, because it does, but these expectations were timid and wholly theoretical.

Thought had made her silent in the middle of the music, and

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the young man, exhilarated by the questions and the answers, was brought a little closer, and was glad.

Stan Parker thought he had never been so close to any girl. The thin girl became familiar to him in the ages of silence in which they sat. For the wobbly music had receded, and the voices of the dancers, assured of their beauty and their cleverness. Only the girl's face, from which the subterfuge had slipped, was not so sure. Stan Parker knew this girl. As all oblivious objects become known, and with the same nostalgia, the tin cup, for instance, standing in the unswept crumbs on the surface of your own table.

"I must go now," said Amy Fibbens, standing up in her awkward dress.

What is Stan doing all night with the Fibbens girl? Clara asked Lilian Bott.

"It is not as late as that," said Stan.

"Oh yes, it is," sighed the girl.

He followed her out of the room, his back obscuring her departure for those who watched.

Their steps, if not their voices, were mingling through the empty streets of the dead town. Iron lace hung from dark pubs, and the heavy smells of spilled beer.

"I wonder if this town will still be here in a thousand years," yawned Amy Fibbens.

His mind fumbled lazily and failed. He did not see the point. But he did not doubt permanence.

"I shan't worry if it is not," sighed the girl.

"I could easy do with a thousand years," he suddenly said. "Why, you'd see things happen. Historical things. And you'd see the trees turning into coal. You'd be able to remember the fossils, how they looked when they were walking about."

He had never before said anything like this.

"Perhaps too much would happen," the girl replied. "Perhaps there'd be a fossil or two you wouldn't want to remember."

Because now they were on the outskirts of the town. There was a smell of sheep, and of water drying in a mud hole. And

soon the yellow Fibbens' doorway, leaning outwards, and the yellow straws of light that fell from the cracks in walls into darkness.

"Well," said Amy Fibbens, "we have had a talk. About a lot of things."

It was quite right. They had talked about almost everything, because words occasionally will rise to the occasion and disgorge whole worlds.

Just as the darkness will disgorge a white face under a dusty tree.

"Will you be coming to this place again at all, perhaps?" asked the girl.

"On Saturday week," said the usually slow man.

And again he was surprised.

Under the sad tree, more frond than bark, beside the girl's blurred face, less shape than longing, his intention was absolute.

Stan Parker did not decide to marry the Fibbens girl, if decision implies pros and cons; he simply knew that he would do it, and as there was no reason why the marriage ceremony should be delayed, it was very soon performed, in the little church at Yuruga.

Clarrie Bott came to the church, because, as he explained to his reluctant lady and disgusted girls, the boy's mother was his dead, or rather his defunct, cousin. Uncle Fibbens was there too, in boots, with a handful of family, but not Aunt, whose seventh was at breast. Only Mrs. Erbey benefited emotionally by the ceremony. The parson's wife was happy at a wedding, especially if she knew the girl. She gave Amy Fibbens a Bible, a blouse as good as new (it was only slightly singed near the waist), and a little silver nutmeg grater that someone had given her at her own wedding and with which she had never known what to do.

Amy Parker, fingering the silver nutmeg grater, found it a similar problem but the loveliest thing she had ever seen, and she thanked Mrs. Erbey gratefully.

The day was fine, if cold, on the steps of the blunt church,

when Amy Parker prepared to stow herself and her goods in her husband's cart and leave Yuruga.

"Good-bye, Ame," mouthed Uncle Fibbens.

The wind had made him water, and the rims of his eyes were very red. The cousins clawed.

"Good-bye, Uncle," said Amy calmly. "Good-bye, youse!" As she smacked a random bottom.

Finally, when the kids had thrown a handful of rice, and the cart was beginning to pull away from the stumpy church, the Parkers, which was what they now were, knew that it was over, or that it had begun.

The cart drove away, over the ruts in that part of the town. The gay horse tossed his forelock. Thin clouds flew. "Well, there we are," laughed the man's warm voice. "It's a long ride. You mustn't mind."

"Wouldn't help if I did." The girl lazily smiled at the landscape, holding her hat.

Their different bodies jolted with the cart. Now they were distinct, and one, they could look without effort into each other's eyes.

Only, as the town of Yuruga jerked past and away from them, Amy Parker's eyes were at present for the landscape. What she had just done, whether momentous or usual, did not concern other people. She did not belong to anyone in that town. Her fat aunt had not cried, nor had she expected it. She herself had never cried for any specific person. But now she began to feel a sadness as she struggled against the possessive motion of the cart.

The cart rocked. The road pulled at her heart. And Amy Parker, now in the full anguish of departure, was torn slowly from the scene in which her feeling life had been lived. For this last look Amy Parker turned, holding her hat in the wind. There was a sheet of iron on the ground, that had come off Fibbens' roof in a gale once, and that they had always talked about putting back. Ah dear, then she could not hold it. She was all blubbery at the mouth.

He had begun to make the clucking noises at the horse, and stroking with the whip the hairy rump.

"You are sorry then," he said, moving his hand farther along the board, so that it touched.

"I've nothing to lose at Yuruga," she said. "Had me ears boxed, and roused on all this time."

But she blew her nose. She could not escape her childhood. So he stayed quiet beside her. There are the sadnesses of other people that it is not possible to share. But he knew that she was not regretful. It was something, just, that must be fought out. So he was content.

It was a long ride. It was soon the sandy kind of bush road that there is no consuming. Once their wheels thrashed through brown water, and the coolness of the fresh, splashed water drank at her hot skin.

That, he said, was Furlong Creek. She would remember, she felt, gravely, this that her husband was telling her.

The cart was livelier after that. Wind flung the sweat from the horse's shoulders back into their faces. There was a reckless smell of wet leather, and broken leaves that the wind had been dashing from the trees in that part of the bush. All and all were flung together, twig and leaf, man and woman, horse's hair and ribbon reins, in the progress that the landscape made.

"Does it always blow in these parts?" She laughed.

He made a motion with his mouth. It was not one of the things to answer. Besides, he recognized and accepted the omnipotence of distance.

But this was something she did not, and perhaps never would. She had begun to hate the wind, and the distance, and the road, because her importance tended to dwindle.

Just then, too, the wind took the elbow of a bough and broke it off, and tossed it, dry and black and writhing, so that its bark harrowed the girl's cheek, slapped terror for a moment into the horse, and crumbled, used and negative, in what was already their travelled road.

Achhh, cried the girl's hot breath, her hands touching the livid moment of fright that was more than wound, while the man's body was knotted against the horse's strength.

When they were settled into a recovered breathing the man looked at the cut in his wife's cheek. It was the cheek of the thin girl whose face had become familiar to him the night of the ball, and whom apparently he had married. And he was thankful.

Oh dear, she gasped thankfully, feeling the hardness of his body.

Their skins were grateful. And unaccustomedly tender.

They had not kissed much.

No other event disturbed the monotony of emotion, the continuity of road, the relentlessness of scrub that first day, until, about evening, just as their faces were beginning to grow grey, they came to the clearing the man had made to live in.

Now his modest achievement was fully exposed. The voice of a dog, half-aggressive, half-hopeless, leaped into the cool silence.

"This is the place," the man said, jumping down, "it's not all violets, as you can see."

As she could see, but she must also speak, she knew.

"Once I saw a house," she said, in the even dreamlike voice of inspiration, "that had a white rosebush growing beside it, and I always said that if I had a house I would plant a white rose. It was a tobacco rose, the lady said."

"Well," he said, laughing up at her, "you have the house."

"Yes," she said, getting down.

It did not help much, so she touched his hand. And there was a dog smelling at the hem of her skirt, that she looked down dubiously to see.

"What is his name?" she asked.

He said that the dog had no particular name.

"But he should have one," she said.

The moment a conviction had animated her bones she began to take the things from their cart, and to arrange their belongings in the house, as if it were the natural thing to do.

"There is water," he said, coming and standing a bucket inside the doorway.

The level of the water lapped quietly and settled down.

She went to and fro in what was becoming her house. She

heard the sound of his axe. She thrust her shoulders through the window, outside which it was determined she should plant the white rose, and where the slope of the land was still restless from the jagged stumps of felled trees.

"Where is the flour?" she called. "And I cannot see the salt."

"I shall come," he said, rummaging after the sticks of wood.

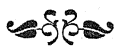
It was that hour of evening when the sky is bled white as scattered woodchips. The clearing was wide open. The two people and their important activities could not have been more exposed. About that importance there was no doubt, for the one had become two. The one was enriched. Their paths crossed, and diverged, and met, and knotted. Their voices spoke to each other across gulfs. Their mystery of purpose had found the solution to the mystery of silence.

"I shall like it here." She smiled, over the crumbs on the table, when they had eaten the damper she had slapped together, and some rancid remnants of salt beef.

He looked at her. It had never really occurred to him, in the deep centre of conviction, that she might not like his place. It would never occur to him that what must be, might not. The rose that they would plant was already taking root outside the window of the plain house, its full flowers falling to the floor, scenting the room with its scent of crushed tobacco.

Already, as a boy, his face had been a convinced face. Some said stony. If he was not exactly closed, certainly he opened with difficulty. There were veins in him of wisdom and poetry, but deep, much of which would never be dug. He would stir in his sleep, the dream troubling his face, but he would never express what he had seen.

So instead of telling her smooth things, that were not his anyway, he took her hand over the remnants of their sorry meal. The bones of his hand were his, and could better express the poem that was locked inside him and that would never otherwise be released. His hand knew stone and iron, and was familiar with the least shudder of wood. It trembled a little, however, learning the language of flesh.



Chapter 2

LIFE continued in that clearing in which Parkers had begun to live. The clearing encroached more and more on the trees, and the stumps of the felled trees had begun to disappear, in ash and smoke, or rotted away like old teeth. But there remained a log or two, big knotted hulks for which there seemed no solution, and on these the woman sometimes sat in the sun.

Sometimes the red dog sat and looked at the woman, but not closely as he did at the man. If she called to him, his eyes became shallow and unseeing. He was the man's dog.

Never far from the dog the man would be at work. With axe, or scythe, or hammer. Or he would be on his knees, pressing into the earth the young plants he had raised under wet bags. All along the morning stood the ears of young cabbages. Those that the rabbits did not nibble off. In the clear morning of those early years the cabbages stood out for the woman more distinctly than other things, when they were not melting, in a tenderness of light.

If the woman came and stood by the man, when the sun had risen, after frost, when the resentful blood had settled in the veins, he would show her how he was chipping the earth in the rows between the cabbages.

"Not this way," he said, "because you cover up the weeds. But this way."

Not that she had to be shown. Or listened. Not that he did not know this, but had her by him. He could feel her warmth. She wore a big old straw hat with frayed spokes where the binding had come unsewn, and the hat made her face look too small and white. But her body had thickened a little. She no longer jerked when she turned, or threatened to break at the hips. Her flesh was growing conscious and suave.

"Not this way. But this way," he said.

Teaching her not this, but the movements of her own body as she walked between the rows of cabbages. He did not often raise

his eyes, chipping the thawed earth, but he carried against him the shape of her body.

So that he too was taught. She was imprinted on him.

Sometimes she would look up from her plate and speak, after tearing a mouthful of bread, speak with her mouth too full, the voice torn. He would hear and remember this voice again when he was alone. Her too greedy voice. Because she *was* rather greedy, for bread, and, once discovered, for his love.

Her skin devoured the food of love, and resented those conspiracies of life that took it from her before she was filled. She would look from the window into the darkness, hearing the swinge of metal and the thwack of leather, seeing the dark distortion of a cart with its mountain of cabbages against the stars.

"I have filled the water-bag," she would call.

As the man tore at stiff buckles, and cold leather resisted his hands. As he moved round and round the horse and cart, preparing for the journey of cabbages.

"And there's a slice of pie beneath the sandwiches," she said. To say.

Because it was cold on her shoulders in the morning, and in the bed when he had gone, and the hoofs of the horse were striking their last notes from the stones, and the cart had creaked its final music. She could not warm back his body in the forsaken bed.

Sometimes he would be gone a whole day and night after the market, if there was business to transact or things to buy.

Then the forsaken woman was again the thin girl. The important furniture of her marriage were matchsticks in the hollow house. Her thin, child's life was a pitiful affair in the clearing in the bush.

Sometimes she mumbled the words she had been taught to say to God.

On the scratched mahogany table which the man had bought at auction, she had put the Bible from the parson's wife. She turned the pages respectfully. She said or read the words. And she waited for the warmth, the completeness, the safety of reli-

gion. But to achieve this there was something perhaps that she had to do, something that she had not been taught, and in its absence she would get up, in a desperation of activity.

She did not receive the grace of God. The mercy of God was the sound of wheels at the end of market day. And the love of God was a kiss full in the mouth. The woman Amy Fibbens was absorbed in the man Stan Parker, whom she had married. And the man, the man consumed the woman. That was the difference.

In the town in which men transacted their business, bought flour and sugar, got drunk, talked big, Stan Parker began to be known. He did not assert himself but would give or receive opinions, whenever asked. People began to recognize his face.

Sometimes he stood in the pubs with other men, wrapped in the damp blankets of beerful reminiscence, and listened to what they had to say. This was endless. Tried in drought, flood, and fire, the heroic muscles of these men had performed prodigious feats. They had caught fish and killed snakes. They had hurled bullocks into heaps. They had eaten and drunk, lost and won, more than other men.

Stan Parker sometimes listened to the voices of men in pubs, but he did not feel the necessity to translate his own life into brave words. His life as lived was enough.

Life at Bangalay, the market town, did not convince Stan. In the comfortable silence, in a blandishment of trees, in the smell of hot leather, the young man drove homeward after market days. Distance flooded his soul. He began to open. He would remember many simple but surprising things: his mother combing the hair from a brush, the soldiers on the battlements of Elsinore, the breath of a roan cow at daybreak, mouths biting at a prayer but not consuming. All the riches of memory were recounted on these mornings.

He was strong still. He loved the enormous smooth tree that he had left standing outside the house. He loved. He loved his wife, who was just then coming with the bucket from behind their shack, in the big hat with spokes like a wheel, and under it her

bony face. He loved, and strongly too, but it was still the strength and love of substances.

"Well," he said, hiding his love, "and what has happened? Anybody come?"

"Nothing," she said, diffident beneath her hat. "What do you expect," she said, "a steam engine?"

Other people came to live in those parts. From time to time they passed by, all tables and mattresses, on drays and bullock wagons, or some putting on dog in a buggy with new black paint.

There was a rosebush now, growing against the veranda, a white rose, of which Amy Parker had thought and spoken, and which he had brought to her from town. It was already a branching, irregular bush, with the big wads of shapely paper roses just smelling of tobacco. Cold perhaps. It belonged to the dank green light on that side of the house, where it stood in the long weed that is called cow-itch. Its branches would grow black and straggly later on. But the rosebush of Amy Parker was still green, sappy wood. The marble roses were solid in the moonlight. The white roses glared back at the heavy light of noon or fluttered papery down into the yellow-green of the cow-itch.

Several times in those years Amy Parker attempted to have their child, but evidently this was not intended to happen.

"This is a barren stretch of the road," she said, laughing.

For now Parkers were adopting the evasions and pretences of a childless intimacy. They persuaded themselves that their neat house was not the box which enclosed their lives. They were still young, of course, so that their fallibility had not yet been revealed, except by flashes, which can be dismissed as dreams. They loved, sometimes with inspiration, also occasionally with resentment. They desired each other's presence perhaps less than before. Sometimes they made excuses for each other.

More often than not, Amy Parker was a bright, industrious young woman, shaking a duster off the veranda or sitting on a log to shell peas. If the floods of life swelled inside her, they were not seen in those parts, where she was respected, and also liked. Only sometimes her face devoured the landscape, or she waited

for the roof to be torn off, but only sometimes. So Parkers continued to be respected in those parts. There was no one could sink a post hole like Stan Parker, or fell a tree, or shoe a horse at a pinch, with improvised tools, in shorter time, which he had of course from his dad. If a poetry sometimes almost formed in his head, or a vision of God, nobody knew, because you did not talk about such things, or, rather, you were not aware of the practice of doing so.

Halfway to Bangalay a church had been built, for people of the surrounding district to keep their Sundays in. And some did. Prayers were read, and the lurching hymns were sung. You could not call it worship so much as an act of decent behaviour, at least for most. Amy Parker went out of respect for the gentler moments of her upbringing. And she liked to sing a sad hymn. If she ventured beyond acts, it was to consider the remoteness of her husband's shoulder. What does Stan, in his Sunday clothes, think of in church? she wondered, brushing from her face the flies and a shadow of resentment. She resented some personal experience enclosed in him, subtler than her own yearning occasioned by the sad hymns. Her voice had a slightly voluptuous curve. She kept a bottle of scent, that she shook up and sprinkled on her front for Sunday church, and that scented the hot horse-hair and the dust. As she sang through her rather moist lips, she was glossy to look at, her substance was indisputable. But you could not put your finger on what there was about Stan.

The man himself could not have told. He was confused, because his wife was watching, and the words of worship expected too much. His body too, of which he was partly ashamed, made him kneel with an awkwardness that he did not connect with humility. At times, though, peace did descend, in a champing of horses' bits at a fence outside, in some word that suddenly lit, in birds bringing straws to build nests under the eaves, in words bearing promises, which could perhaps have been the grace of God.

Apart from these intimations, their lives stood foursquare. Now they had a string of cows, and two heifers, and a young chubby bull. Parkers were going over to cows. Their mornings

were lit by the yellow light of lamps. Their silver breath went before them in a cloud. They were stiff as the bucket handles that clanked beside them through the frosty yard, towards the milking.

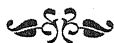
When times were hard Stan Parker worked with the road gang at Bangalay. He came home at week-ends. He was silenter then, more dried up, harder, the dust of road metal had lodged in the lines of his face. But they put by a bit. And Amy milked the cows. She would take the milk round afterwards, to those parts north of Bangalay which were becoming more closely settled.

For one stretch of several months Stan worked for Mr. Armstrong and got good money. Mr. Armstrong was a rich butcher who had built a country house. He had made so much, it was time to become a gentleman and perpetuate his importance in red brick. So his country house, Glastonbury, was built about a mile from Parkers', in gardens and a maze of laurel hedges and ornamental trees. In some windows there was coloured glass. And there was a stone statue of a woman modestly disguising her nakedness with her hands.

It is not known how or why the district in which Parkers lived got its name, but it was about this time that the official voice began to refer to it as Durilgai. And this meant "fruitful," a friend of Mr. Armstrong's who was a professor, or something, said. But the people who lived in that district were disinclined to use their name, anyway for a long time, as if something was expected of them that they could not, or did not care to, fulfil.

Amy Parker slowed up her rather slapdash hand in writing it, and spoke it to herself with full, thoughtful breath. Her expression withdrew into her face when strangers mentioned the official word, and she continued to refer to their district by the names of those people amongst whom the land was parcelled out.

Sometimes she sat beside the bush of full white roses, her arms awkward in unemployment, at the place that was "Parkers'," and looked at the road. In all that district the names of things were not so very important. One lived. Almost no one questioned the purpose of living. One was born. One lived.



Chapter 3

WHEN Amy Parker did finally have her baby, the neighbours moved their faces into all the correct positions of congratulation and approval, but of course it was quite an ordinary act. Many fruitful women were lying down and having babies regularly, after the laundry, or the baking, or a hot morning in church, and no fuss at all. But Amy Parker exalted her own act on the quiet. She walked about on the shady borders of the house, and she was the centre of the universe.

"It'll be nice for you to have," said the postmistress, pressing her yellow thumb on a dry sponge. "Company, like. Is he good?"

"Of course he is good," said Amy Parker. "Oh yes, Mrs. Gage, he's a very healthy boy."

He was the child of their bodies. She would unwrap him to look at his healthy nakedness. She called him Ray. It was a name that she had not thought of before, and had not heard used much, but it fitted itself to her mouth, and to the little, perfect boy, lying in the gold of the morning on the open bed. The sun glittered on his mouth and the first down of hair.

Now that the house was full of the warm, soft smell of the baby, the father of the child entered with greater diffidence. The baby returned the father's stare but gave no glimpse of himself through his clear, shallow eyes. His glances and expressions were reserved for his mother. The cord between them had not been cut.

"Seems to be doing all right," the father would say.

Then he would turn his back, glad of this release. Later on he would speak to him, he said, and teach him to make things. They

would go off into the bush with axe or gun, and there would be many things to say. They would wipe the sweat from their faces, and drink cold water from their hands, returning at evening with the carcass of a fox that his boy had shot. Whether he would be able to convey to his son the quivering of his own soul on the brink of discovery remained to be seen.

"You never touch him," said the mother. "I believe you don't love him at all."

Taking her baby that she alone could love enough.

"What am I to do?" he asked, offering his empty hands. "What can you do with a baby?"

A baby is an abstraction, still an idea, to which you have not yet had time to adjust your opinions and your habits.

"What can you *do*?" she said. "Why, you can eat him!"

She could have. She could not love him enough, not even by slow, devouring kisses. Sometimes her moist eyes longed almost to have him safe inside her again.

"I'd put it down," said the father. "It can't be healthy to maul it like that."

"What do *you* know?" said the mother. "He's safe enough with me."

But "safe" is an optimistic word. Her hands would withdraw from the child she had put to sleep, and already the future was growing in the house, making a tangle of the present.

The father and mother would sometimes watch the sleeping child, and in this way were united again, as they were not when he was awake. Released from this obsessive third life that they seemed to have created, the lives that they had lived and understood were plain as cardboard. Affection is less difficult than love. But the sleeping baby moved his head, and the parents were again obsessed by vague fear, the mother that she might not ride the storms of love, the father that he would remain a stranger to his son.

The clock ticked in the kitchen. It was an ugly clock, in dark marble, of which they had been proud in the beginning. As the

little boy grew, firm and gilded, he would ask to be held up to the clock, to watch its progress. Then he would press his red mouth to the glass and drink the minutes, so that for a moment the ugliness was swallowed down, and the dim face of the clock was outshone by the golden cheeks of the boy. One day, about the time when he had begun to run about with confidence and become a pest, the clock stopped for good, and it was about this time also that Amy Parker had her second child, a rather fretful baby girl.

Again people came on the occasion of a birth, and drank tea, and exclaimed, and talked about themselves, and went. But soon Amy Parker was alone with her children, and not even her husband could have denied her sovereignty. Giving her breast to the little girl, she forgot her husband, who was out and about somewhere, doing the things that had to be done. His functions were remote as the baby sucked and the boy grew drowsy on the bed. If the father had come in at just this point, which fortunately he did not, the mother would have raised her shoulder to ward him off, to shield those acts of peacefulness and intimacy which were hers alone to watch. Nobody, of course, ever admitted any of this. The mother would often go and laughingly put the children in the father's arms, making him accept that fatherhood of which he appeared diffident. These were gestures she could afford, because at such moments she realized she was strong. Sometimes, though, more particularly in the evening, when the children were sleeping and their empty clothes hung from lines in the kitchen, the wife rose from where the mother had sat and began turning in the room, wondering whether the father, who was also her husband, would still recognize her. Then it was his turn to laugh at diffidence.

But the preponderance of strength was almost always hers. It flowed confidently from her breasts, and the frail body of the baby received something of this bland strength, and the little boy, calling to her from a dream, was comforted by a hand.

Once when the baby was fed, and Amy Parker was buttoning

her blouse, there was the grating of somebody's cart, someone that had come, and before long it was evident that this was Mrs. O'Dowd.

"Ah well, you are with your family, I perceive," said the neighbour woman with a kind of primness, turning her head even, and speaking east when it should have been north.

"I am with them most hours of the day, and why not?" said Amy Parker, who had by this time arranged her blouse.

"No, an why not," said her friend. "If it's breedun a person is up to, it takes their time, and no mistake, as I know meself, if only from the little pigs and calves."

Amy Parker brought her friend right in, whom she had not seen for some time, though why, she did not know.

"Ah," said Mrs. O'Dowd. "So this is the little boy. He is growun fit to beat the corn. An the baby. She is smaller than the boy," she said. "Though a little girl would perhaps be small."

"She is doing nicely," said the mother, exploring the baby's face.

"An not of such a good colour. But that could well be the heat. We all take on a better colour when the autumn comes."

So that Amy Parker began to resent the presence of a friend who could turn her child into a delicate one before her eyes.

"Would you care for a piece of cake, Mrs. O'Dowd, with your tea?" she asked, still polite.

No one else found fault with the health of the Parker children, or if they did, they were too polite to speak their thoughts. The mother reared her children, first with diffidence and a cyclopædia, then with arrogant infallibility as her experience grew. Very soon no one could tell her what she did not know. Indeed, she became oracular, giving advice to others in flashes of inspiration, for which the younger and more timid were grateful, but which older women received with slow, sour-sweet smiles.

Amy Parker was not deterred, now that she had achieved her family.

If there had been delay in christening Parkers' second child, it

was because the baby did show some signs of delicacy in her first months, however her mother might deny. But finally the parents grew used to their fears, and arrangements were made with Mr. Purbrick, and they drove the little pale girl to the plain brown church in a buggy the father had bought from a baker's widow in Bangalay. The family sat up against one another in the still quite presentable buggy, in their best clothes, which were too dark for the heat of the day. The mother held the baby tightly, hotly, in her best shawl, shooing the flies away with her glove. The father's large, hard hands lightly and expertly held the reins, making a glad business of it. And the little boy blew out his red-brown cheeks and kept on making an obscene noise with his mouth, till his mother had to tell him to stop.

"You get on my nerves," she said.

"Why?" he asked, his voice sulking towards a cry.

"Because," she answered wearily.

"Look," said the father in an amicable, masculine, peacemaking way. "There's Peabodys' twin heifers. We'll be there soon. I wonder if old Purbrick's dusted his voice."

"How?" asked the little boy.

"Your father's being silly," said the mother. "He means that Mr. Purbrick doesn't always speak very clearly. What's that?" she asked suddenly. "How did you cut your knee, Ray?"

"I didn't," he said.

"But there it is, as large as life. I'll trouble you not to tell me lies, please. Or play with knives."

"He gave me one."

"He? Who?" she breathed.

"Dad."

"When you're not to play with knives!"

"A boy has to begin," said the father.

Today he was too lazy to defend, to resist or protest. He half-closed his eyes to the sun, and knew that he owned the horse and buggy, and even the woman and the two children beside him. As much as you can own anything.

"Here we are at the church," he said.

Doves were drooling on the roof to emphasize the peacefulness of the occasion, and the mother began to feel both happy and sad. Churches took her that way.

"I hope she will be all right," she murmured tearfully.

Then she prepared smiles for the old parson and for the godparents, who were standing in a group. The parents themselves were uncertain why just these people had been chosen. You had to have somebody, though. So here were Ossie Peabody, and Mrs. Gage, and a Mrs. Firth, a kind sort of woman that no one had anything against, for the child's christening.

She was to be called Thelma, that the mother had first seen in a newspaper, the name of a grazier's heiress. The father had been doubtful at first, but he was won over finally by his wife's silences. Anyway, he did not think much about names. So Thelma the little girl became. The mother spoke it to herself, filling her mouth with it like a satin sweetie, except that the word had about it something richer, rarer, less attainable.

When the old man pronounced the name of Thelma Parker in a sound of cool water, the baby cried of course, and the mother was proud and agitated.

Stan Parker, the father, was trying to recapture the sense of ownership that he had experienced on the journey to the church, but now that his daughter was labelled with his name he was less sure. He was uncertain even of his own boots as he listened to the words of the unfamiliar service chasing one another in the moustache of the old man. So Stan Parker felt the strain of his immediate vicinity. Inwardly he edged a little farther away from the christening group.

"What?" he asked in a guilty whisper.

Because his wife was speaking.

"She behaved beautifully," she repeated with round satisfaction.

The touch of the old clergyman's hands was the touch of cool, papery, blameless skins, and his words too were blameless, as he

gave advice and made attempts at jokes, not altogether successfully, for he was not by nature a jolly parson, though he felt he should have been.

At the moment of departure, foreshortened in the yellow light of summer, everyone, even the united family, was a bit solitary. The half-grown, raggedy pine trees dared the personality to assert itself. The more recent graves in the churchyard had not yet begun to furnish the landscape. They were too close to the act of death. This was still present in the wounds of yellow clay that had not healed up. But the family drew away, past the jars of dead flowers, through the yellow, clinging burs, and very soon all feelings of awfulness, exaltation, doom, or self-importance began to be translated into the comfortable and earthy crunch of the buggy.

On the journey home, and afterwards, the children predominated. Their childhood was the usual lengthy one. This lengthiness would impress itself sometimes also on the parents, as they dragged up hot hills or sat on long evenings listening to the sleep of children in another room. These were, on the whole, becalmed years, in spite of the visible evidence of growth. Any reference to the future was made, not with conviction, but in accordance with convention.

"I would like Ray to be something in the government, or a famous surgeon, or something like that. In dark clothes. And we would read about him in the newspaper," said the mother in a dream voice.

The father laughed, remembering how his own mother had failed to contain him. He laughed and said, "What will become of the cows?"

"We can sell the cows," said the little boy, who was already listening to most things. "I hate smelly old milk. I want to be rich, like Armstrongs, and have horses and things, and a pair of yellow boots."

Then he ran across the yard, to put an end to speculation, still without belief in the efficacy of this. He was surrounded by sun-

light, and the warm, hard forms of stones, and the fluffy, melting ones of red hens in the dust. He lived for what he saw and did. He took from his pocket a little catapult that an older boy had made, and was looking about to let fly when he heard his father call, "I'll tan you, Ray, if I catch you again at those hens."

So he began scratching at a tree, to scratch his name, to impress his will with his hands on some thing. He was already quite strong. Stronger than his sister, whom he liked to persecute. She had a kind of fretful pallor that is distasteful to strength.



Chapter 4

BY THIS TIME Amy Parker had grown greedy for love. She had not succeeded in eating her husband, though she had often promised herself in moments of indulgence that she would achieve this at some future date. But she had not. He retreated from her once again.

Amy Parker had broadened with age, was almost what some people would have called a little coarse. Her hands and back were broad. She was filled with a deep breathing, that conveyed itself to people of another kind as contentment, and especially to children, who liked to be near her, and hear her, and touch her. Her skin was particularly pleasant, clear, and brown, and comforting. Sometimes, though, she could be sharp, sour even, as if the thin and anxious girl were still buried in her flesh, and she could complain and sting. At such times her dark hair hung in tails, that she would not bother to put up. Then her husband would walk quietly, or round the other side of the house. His face looked long and grave on those days.

"Come here, Ray," she would say. "Do you love me?"

As if he might answer, instead of kick the ground.

"Thelma does then," she would say, dashing the water from her glistening arms and burnishing them with a rough towel.

But the little girl would continue to talk in a low voice to her doll, as if she had not heard.

The mother could not compel. Even though there were moments, those evenings, when she gathered her children into her now placid arms, and held in her arms that conglomeration of love from which not one of them was separable, there were times also when she could not read their thoughts, when their faces

became like little wooden boards, promising forever to remain flat and impregnable.

Then she would go and look along the road, along the dust and strands of rusty wire.

"What's up, Amy?" her husband asked, intruding cautiously on one of these occasions.

"Nothing," she said. "Oh, nothing."

Only in the evening, darkness and walls forced them together. They talked about flat, measured things. Or he read pieces from the newspaper, that he held upright beside the lamp. Or they listened to the frogs, that surrounded the house with an illusion of water. But it was dry just then.

Once when the mother was standing with her little girl by the gate, in the white glare of summertime, the trees limp with exhaustion and shabby with dust, there came a figure on a horse, that the standing figure shaded her eyes to see. The horse was advancing with the loose indolence of an animal that is kept for pleasure. He was a lovely horse. Glittering with jet and sweat, he continued to advance, till his rider also began to assume features, and became a woman in a habit, no less grand than her grand horse, as she sat with her leg cocked across the horn of the saddle, and swayed with that same indolence of the beast, and swayed, and thought.

So the dark-figured woman on the black horse advanced beneath the white trees. Although the dust of the road was unfurling beneath the horse's feet, it scarcely reached the woman's spur, she sat so high, and in the sea of dust in which she floated, was godlike and remote.

"Isn't the lady lovely, Mum?" said the little girl with a prim, mincing mouth.

She hoped she was saying the sort of thing her mother herself would say. She attempted at times almost slavishly to do the right things.

But Amy Parker did not speak. She stood shading her eyes, and it was as if she were opening in the silence to receive and unite with the rider and the horse, as if her life craved to be set in the same slow and stately motion, free above the dust.

So the creamy woman rode by. She was smiling for some situation of which undoubtedly she had been the central figure, and this had pleased her, and in it certainly she had known success. But the smile just drifted on her creamy face. As she flowed by. While the rusty strands of the wire fence were paid out, and out. While the hairy trunks of trees jerked past.

The little girl wondered whether the strange and beautiful woman would speak, but the mother did not expect this. The woman's smile drifted over the head of the puny child, and on, without glancing at the mother, magnificent though she was too in her own rooted way. But the woman was passing. She obviously did not intend to form unnecessary relationships even of the most transient kind. Already the bronzy sheen of her hair was breaking in a distant light.

"Well, she's gone, Mum. What are we standing for?" complained the little girl. "I wonder what she is called."

In time they knew, for Mrs. O'Dowd had found out.

Mrs. O'Dowd said she was a girl, or woman was closer, she was not a chicken by any means, woman then, if you liked, and her name was Madeleine. Whatever else of a name she could not tell. No matter, said Mrs. O'Dowd, for neither you nor me will be any the wiser. Anyway, this Madeleine was a famous beauty like you read of, going to places, and the races, and the picnic races, always in demand, it seemed, and above all at picnic races. This Madeleine had also been Home, and to various foreign countries, hawking her looks around; she should have married a lord, it wasn't for want of trying, only she was out of luck. So they said. But still courted. Now, it seemed, and this was the important part, according to that Mrs. Frisby, cook at Armstrongs', whose husband had been a sailor that never come back—now it seemed that young Armstrong was shook on this Madeleine, was moving heaven and earth to have his way, with presents and horses, and she sometimes cold, sometimes warm, but mostly cold, for she was no fool. Many a wealthy man would have taken this Madeleine, it seemed. She had only to say the word, and had perhaps, the diamonds were there to see in a black velvet case, and ivory brushes with monygrams. But that was on

the side, like. She was playing a cool game. It is the ring and the establishment that counts with most, and with this Madeleine, and why not.

After this the neighbour woman, who was passing in her customary fashion, clapped her reins and went. And Amy Parker remained where she was.

All her acts after this became secret silk. She thought of Madeleine. She began to wonder whether she could have resisted the advances of a lord, if he had driven up, and she wearing a mauve dress such as she had never owned. What words she would have spoken she had not yet formed, but felt, but knew. She would have had children perhaps, as well as diamonds from the lord. His eyes had a tenderness, a kindness, remote from the sensuality of the body, that was also her husband's.

She thought of Madeleine as she lay straight in her bed. Whole skeins of sleep flowed from the brims of their hats as they rode together through the wind of darkness. They were exchanging secrets. I have never had one, murmured Amy Parker, not of any importance, not with anyone. There, said Madeleine, is one. Amy Parker opened her hand. It was a piece of glass, or a rather big diamond. The confused cry of birds that came from her throat folded her words up. Madeleine laughed. They rode, and their stirrup irons held hands. There was no longer even a chinking, they were so close.

"What is it?" asked Stan Parker.

"I was dreaming," sighed his wife. "It was funny. About a horse."

He cleared his throat, and was asleep.

She lay gently, hoping if she fell slowly she would recapture that same part of her smooth dream. But the horses had ridden on. And when she woke in the morning it was indeed funny, not to say ridiculous, that dream. She stuck the pins in her hair and fixed a glossy bun. She who had been dreaming of the dark rider could not have told how she longed for them to share a precipice. If they were to meet, which they would not. Their lives were disparate. She put down her brush, of which the bristles had been worn short, and went out to get the buckets.

Summer took hold of the country, and it dried up. The leaves of the trees were sandpapery together, and when a wind blew through the yellow grass it rattled in dead yellow stems. There was a scurf of dry seed on the grey earth, and where the cattle gathered at the waterholes and creeks, nosing the green scum, the earth had set in craters.

There were many dead things in the landscape—the grey skeletons of trees, an old weak cow that had stuck in the mud and did not rise again, lizards that life had left belly upwards. It seemed at times during that summer that everything would die. The wind, when it blew down the hot funnels of summer, stirred the flags of dry corn. There were many insects that Amy Parker noticed for the first time, and the veins of dead leaves. During this period, while her husband went about his work, doctoring a sick cow or doing things with wire, while her little boy played with a green bottle in the dust, filling and emptying as if it were the sole importance, she was looking over their heads, waiting for something to happen. As it did eventually. In this position, and frame of mind, she saw the first smoke, in that part of the country which is called The Islands, in the direction of Wullunya.

The smoke grew skywards, small still, a sapling of smoke, but growing. So she went and told her husband.

"Yes," he said, "it's a fire all right."

He looked up, with the pliers in his hand, from the knot he was tying in a piece of wire. He had seen the fire already, of course, but he was not telling. He half-hoped it would vanish into smoke.

All around, people were telling each other, the women full of information, the slower men less willing to accept fact. Some men swore when they were told, and one even hit his wife with a bucket, so that she fell down and the blood gushed out.

But the men began to gather together, after the first moment of hesitation and desire to turn their backs on the fire. They looked for their axes, and fetched out sacking, and filled their water-bags, and asked for a bit of tucker to see them through while they were gone. Then they climbed onto their horses or into their carts, and made off in the direction of The Islands,

where the fire was. By this time it had grown angry. Passionate volumes of smoke towered above the bush.

The volunteers from Durilgai had gone several miles when they met a man called Ted Doyle, coming towards them on a wet horse.

The Islands was as good as burned out, said Ted Doyle, waving his arm in the direction of the fire, in which he had lost his hat and his courage. Flanagans' burned out, and Slatterys'; he had seen the walls cave in on the old man. The messenger's eyes were hollowed out by smoke. His white eyes told more, and the Adam's apple jerking in his scrawny throat. When the wind took the fire, the man said, the heat withered up the leaves before the fire, and the hair was shrivelled from your hand. They looked at his hand, and it was, in fact, singed of all hair.

Then the men decided to turn back and find a position from which to defend Durilgai. Old Mr. Peabody suggested they should make a stand about a mile back, where there was a stony hillside and a natural break in the scrub. It was poor country just there, of rocks and rabbit warrens and dead, listing thistles. Along the hill they cleared the scrub, making a wider belt, across which it was hoped the fire would never leap.

All through the days of fire the women went about their business, almost as if the men had not gone. They had really never learned to do otherwise. Only sometimes they looked up at the dirty sky, and seemed to walk more heavily through the yellow light.

And at Glastonbury they waited. As the crisis deepened, and the yellow sky, they felt more isolated. Mr. Armstrong, who had set off in the direction of the fires, returned, cut the end off a cigar, walked through the orchard, and returned. He had developed a slight twitch that had not been visible before.

"For goodness' sake, sit down, Father, or *something*," said his two daughters, who had come out onto the drive.

The daughters of the butcher stood on the gravel, their unused hands folded, and smelling of eau de Cologne. Miss Dora, who had put on her hat, had more or less decided that she would

leave for Sydney, where her brother was conducting their father's business. But Mabel, the younger sister, was unable to decide.

"What will you do, Madeleine?" asked Dora Armstrong.

Madeleine had come out just then onto the terrace. She too was wearing a hat, but because it suited her, its large, lazy brim moved as she walked with slow, indolent steps.

"Why," she said, "I shall read a book probably, and eat a peach I have just seen on the sideboard in the dining room."

Unlike most people, Madeleine remained clean after peaches. Dora hated her skill, for she was anxious in most things. Now she frowned and said, "How can you talk about peaches with those dreadful fires!"

"Somebody will put them out, I expect," Madeleine said.

Or else she would be immolated. In spite of her apparent coolness the palms of her hands felt hot. She sat on the stone balustrade and tossed her ankle for an occupation.

Bronze arms of fire suddenly shot up into the sky in the direction of The Islands, out of the clouds of dirty smoke. It appeared as if something had given way. There was now a visible savagery of destruction in the progress of the fire, which made the Armstrongs admit to themselves that it would not stop at Glastonbury. For the first time they were vulnerable.

Madeleine sensed this. She thought about her lover, now sitting at his smooth desk, at which she had visited him once, and kissed the top of his sleek head, because it was hers. It was a devoted head. This admirable virtue was what she supposed she had desired. Tossing her ankle at the balustrade. And doubted since.

But she did not really suppose she would not pocket her doubts in the end, together with Tom Armstrong's money, and live in broad outline the life she had always intended to live, of parties, and jewels, and mahogany, and candlelight. Only on that morning she was tormented by the fire that could consume, apparently, whole intentions. Anything might go up. So she waited, and exposed her complexion to the sun, in a way that, in normal circumstances, she would not have done.

Down below Durilgai the men who had prepared the break awaited the fire the following morning. It seemed inevitable that it should come. The twiggy framework of the bush cracked in the silence, in the intervals between the gusts of a hot wind. Then, about eleven, the air suddenly seemed to thicken into molten glass.

"It is coming," they said.

As the men prepared for the fire, shifting on their feet, trailing their cut branches, with which they proposed to beat the flames, the bush began to dissolve into stray tendrils of grey smoke, wreathing and twining between the leaves and twigs. The watchers began to breathe the stray smoke, and to stare into the tangled distance for the first flame.

Several bursts of yellow smoke were released all of a sudden, as if from a bag. There was a smoking, and smarting, and crackling, and breaking, and crashing. The fire was reaching upward from the undergrowth, and higher upward, to embrace whole trees.

By late afternoon all that part of the country to the west of Durilgai, through which the road rose from Bangalay, seemed to be under fire. A perverse wind that had no apparent intention of dying down for the night was helping the fire, which was duller, less passionate and spasmodic, but more determined than that which had consumed The Islands.

It began to be obvious that it was heading for those slopes which climbed to Glastonbury. The wind had livened it up. Down in the valleys jaunty tongues of flame rose from the dark mouths, and licked. Patterns of gold emerged from the dark undergrowth as the evening deepened. A few lamps had been lit in the big house, for nobody could really believe in disaster, somebody would find some way out. But in spite of this hopeful belief most of the inmates had come outside.

Down the gully, which in days of peace was the view from Glastonbury, the men had gone to fight the fire, hoping they might conceive a plan before they reached the bottom. Darkness had robbed most of them of any powers of thought, or even action. The fighters did not stand a chance.

Up at the house, however, everyone was comforted that the men had gone down, and many of them big and strong. Mabel Armstrong half-enjoyed, half-trembled at the anarchy of the evening, the rank bodies gathered on the lawns of the house, as she went amongst the crowd of spectators. Some women had already made themselves at home in chairs. Children had fallen asleep in heaps on the crisp lawns, or else were staring at the house, as if they could have broken a piece off and sucked it. Mable Armstrong, whose rather shallow blue eyes had grown deeper in the darkness, turned her back on the lit windows, to which the alternative was the fire.

It seemed to be roaring now, and against it the black specks of men with charred branches at the ends of their arms merely looked ridiculous. The fact was, the fighters had become not only exhausted but fascinated by the fire. They stared into it, into the golden caverns that yawned and tunnelled through the framework of the bush. There were very few who did not succumb to the spell of the fire. They were swayed by it, instead of it by them.

So they withdrew always, and it looked as if their arms were opening to receive it, when Stan Parker, who was on the left wing, looked along his unprotected shoulder and shouted, "Hi! It's coming up from Barrel Creek!"

The spidery figures of caught men looked down to the left, and there it was certainly, a second hand of fire. As it advanced, and it must with that wind, you could see they would be held in a little pocket below Glastonbury, and ringed round, and roasted in those shapes in which their writhing consciousness had left them.

So everybody naturally began to scramble back, until they were standing on the lawns of the garden, in the smoke that they had brought with them, and the questions asked. Nobody could answer questions, nobody really wanted them answered, but to ask them was to assert themselves. The fire rolled along. Up the gravel drive a few volunteers were dragging a reel on which was wound a hose.

It was by this time pretty murky at the big house, round which

the butcher and his wife still hovered. Mrs. Armstrong parted the smoke with diamond hands and whimpered at so much shapelessness.

"Perhaps the wind will turn," said a calm young woman who was standing there, "or a storm break, madam. It is that close, and thundery."

"It will never happen that way," sighed Mrs. Armstrong. "It is not intended to. But where," she said suddenly, rousing herself, "where is Madeleine? I don't remember seeing her all night."

"Madeleine?" said Amy Parker, who was the young woman standing there.

"Yes," said Mrs. Armstrong. "A girl who is my son's fiancée. She has been staying with us for several weeks."

As if others did not know.

"Madeleine!" called Mrs. Armstrong, tottering on swollen ankles, and asking here and there.

But nobody could tell.

"No," said Mabel Armstrong. "I cannot remember where I saw her last. She had a headache. She was going into the garden, she said, I think, for air. But I saw her standing in her room, reading some letters. That could have been before. Or was it afterwards? I couldn't say exactly," Mabel Armstrong said.

But Amy Parker, who had dreamed of Madeleine, knew that she was in the house. Lying on a bed with her eyes closed, or watching the fire from a window in a state of indecision, her long hair hanging down.

"Ahhhh!" they cried. "Did you see it? Nothing will turn it from the house. Those old pines were made to burn."

The pines had been waiting, dedicated to fire. The fire reared up out of the gully, and after executing several complicated figures pressed itself against the huddled pines.

Then Mrs. Armstrong, who was gulping and reeling in the stench of resin, began to call for a sacrifice.

"I must find the girl," she said. "Tom will never believe. He bought the ring only the other Wednesday."

Of diamonds, Amy Parker saw, ringed with fire.

"Stan," she said, touching her husband, who had come up when the pines caught, to be beside her in the chaos, "Stan," she said, "you go into the house and fetch the lady out. You know, the one that rides along our road. With reddish hair."

Just then Stan Parker was not prepared to do everything his wife asked. In the presence of such brilliance he was a dull man, he knew, and passive. He was waiting, not to give, but to receive. His feet were rooted in a wonderment. So that his wife had to touch him again, which she did with authority, knowing his body off by heart. But the worshipping man would not have moved even then if he had not also been touched by fire. He shook his clods of feet, on which he had never got very far. All that he had never done, all that he had never seen, appeared to be contained in this house, and it was opening to him. Till his head began to reel with fiery splendours of its own, and he was prepared to accept the invitation, and follow the passages of the house, or fire, to any possible conclusion.

"I'll have a go," he said and began to walk across the tingling grass, while Mrs. Armstrong called directions that he did not listen to.

Everyone was already very glad that Stan Parker was committed to something positive. A weight was lifted from them. They could now enjoy the spectacle without a conscience. So they sighed and settled themselves, and even those men who were training the feeble hose on the house, as a prelude to its other baptism, let the water spray more aimlessly as they watched Stan Parker, who was going in.

There was a stillness in the house, of which the fate was withheld as the fire wrestled with the willing pines. It was an uneasy stillness, though, with some slight movement in it. Now that he was there, Stan Parker had no doubts that he should have come. Lamplight made him bigger than he was, from the one lamp lit and left beside a book. His shadow, as he walked, became involved with the dormant chandelier, which tinkled faintly. He

smiled in the gloom of this musical cave in which he had found himself, and remembered a play of Hamlet that he had read in a book of his mother's, the teacher, and forgotten, till walking through a houseful of poetry, of which he only had to touch the doors and they would open.

He went from that room, brushing a tapestry that shivered at his shoulder, and rippled, and regained eternity. All things in the house were eternal on that night, if you could forget the fire. Time was becalmed in the passages, and especially at their ends, in the depths of which brooms stood, and possessive winter coats, and scarred garments in old leather. A woman's scratchy straw hat hung from a hook, still smelling of roses and sun. So close was that protective darkness, which the smoke had not yet entered, it was not possible to be afraid. You listened for voices the other side of the wall, of people who had not died.

So that he had to tear himself from the passages and return to a desperate situation. Flinging open a door, he was in a long room of quivering mirrors and impassive chairs. His cloddish boots were quite shameful here. He had come, of course, to look for someone, who was sitting somewhere in one of the rooms of the house, in silk and diamonds. If she would not expect him to speak, he would carry her quickly down, holding her sideways like a stook of oats. But he was afraid of the introduction in words that she would wait for. And touch. He was already nervous of her soft skin.

Outside, the fire had gained a fresh foothold. Something crashed, a bough, even a whole tree, and whole sheets of shattering light shot into the room, where the man, who had, in fact, only been dreaming there an instant, was again all energy and intention.

Now the dark was lighter in the bosom of the house through which Stan Parker ran, in which he found the staircase, stumbled, mounted, paying the banister out through his burning hand, into the pure air of upper rooms. Here too the glare had entered. Huge furniture loomed, bursting its mahogany almost in that light.

Approaching some climax, the breath of the saviour or sacrifice, it was not clear which, came quicker; he hurtled in his heavy boots to the heart of the house, it seemed, and saw that she was standing there, her back towards him, because the fire was of first importance.

Madeleine was wearing some kind of loose gown that shown in the firelight with many other lights. Above this sheath and onto it her hair flowed, for she had loosened it that afternoon in the heat, so that when she turned to him, because she could not very well avoid it, he had never seen anything glowing and flowing like this woman in her shining dress. He stood there feeling the lumps of possible words he might bring out, and almost hoping for some disaster to consume them both.

But Madeleine said, "I was watching the fire. It has got into the schoolroom down there. There's an old papier-mâché globe that the girls used to learn the capitals from, that seemed to go up in a puff. It was horrible." But it might not have been. The words welled out of her in slow waves, of disgust or pleasure, rippling in her throat before they were released.

Stan Parker did not listen to what she said, because this too was unnecessary. Bursts of sparks flew up and past the window, together with tufts of purplish smoke. These were a relief, for he did not need to look any longer at Madeleine. He could say, "They sent me to bring you out. And we oughtn't to waste any time. Follow me, please, and I'll take you down."

"Oh," she said. "They sent you."

She came towards him over some old letters that she had been reading and let fall. She came, but was not yet obedient.

"Of course it is ridiculous of me to be here. And I don't quite know why I am. You must think I'm mad."

All this was what he most dreaded. But she was not yet close. So he shuffled his feet and longed to substitute action for any need to touch.

"There are moments of madness," she said, "in anyone."

Then she was beside him. "I hope I shan't be a liability after all this," said Madeleine.

She was ready to follow him but doubtful that he could save her.

"If we go along here," he said to her gently, "I think we'll find a way down through the back."

"I should be showing you," she said. "This is the first time you've come to the house." Whether this was so or not, her arrogance claimed it. "If we go through the baize door we shall come"—not to the servants' staircase, she softened it—"to the back stairs."

But the fire was there too. It was snapping at the common wood of the servants' stairs. It was writhing upward to make fresh finds. The woman and her rescuer stood there looking down, their eyeballs large and gilded. They were a bit deformed by this fresh development, and drew closer to each other for strength and encouragement.

"Looks like it will have to be the other way," Stan Parker said.

Because here only the dead ends were left. They turned back past the small boxes in which the maids had been contained.

Madeleine moved quickly. She had taken him by the hand and was showing him things.

"When I was a child, quite small, in arms, I believe, I was in a fire," she said, in what had become a loud voice, willing to share with him everything her thought conceived. "I have just begun to remember. It is the light of fire on these high white walls. I can remember a birdcage, but not what happened. Not yet. I think it was too horrible. And now I am in a second fire," she laughed, tossing the dark, reddish hair back from her shoulders, as fire is flung out. "It looks as though I am condemned. But you—" She paused.

They had come to the head of the front stairs, on which smoke still disguised the intentions of the fire.

"And I know nothing about you. You haven't been able to tell. You won't now."

"There isn't anything to tell," Stan Parker said.

She had turned sallow, almost ugly, he was close enough to see, and it made him comfortable. On one side of her nose, that

was very beautiful and fragile, there was a little mark, like a pockmark. And suddenly he wished he could sink his face in her flesh, to smell it, that he could part her breasts and put his face between.

She saw this. They were burning together at the head of the smoking staircase. She had now to admit, without repugnance, that the sweat of his body was drugging her, and that she would have entered his eyes, if she could have, and not returned.

Instead they had begun the last stage of a journey, groping down the soft stairs, moving in the grey and yellow smoke, confusing hands with banisters and banisters with hands. Once their eyes swam together and retreated before admission could be made. Because that between-world of smoke and shapes was more tender.

Then they came out onto the half-landing and felt the first tongue of fire. The breath left them. Now Madeleine's beauty had shrunk right away, and any desire that Stan Parker might have had was shrivelled up. He was small and alone in his body, dragging the sallow woman.

"Don't," she said. "I can't."

She would have fallen down and burned, because it would have been easier.

Till he picked her up. It was not their flesh that touched but their final bones. Then they were writhing through the fire. They were not living. They had entered a phase of pain and contained consciousness. His limbs continued to make progress, outside himself. Carrying her. When her teeth fastened in his cheek it expressed their same agony.

"Look! He is there," they were crying. "They are there. He has her."

The people who were gathered round the burning house, watching that sight of fire, and who had reached the climax of their emotions, began to scream out affectionate and encouraging words, or just to scream, as they saw Stan Parker stumble out, carrying the young woman. They were blackened, but how burned it was not yet possible to tell.

Stan Parker came on. He was holding the body of the woman curved and rigid in his arms. He came on. The cooler air had returned him to his senses, and with them a certain sheepishness for all that had happened.

"Is she dead then?" the people asked each other in quieter voices.

But she was not. She was holding her face in the hollow of his neck, from which she could not yet bring herself to look out. Till she began to rub her face against his neck, waking almost, and coughing, and crying.

Then young Tom Armstrong, who was her lover, and who had come from Sydney on hearing of the fires, ran out to take possession of her. He looked handsome and clean, with his white cuffs, and was smelling of bay rum.

"Madeleine," he called.

But she continued to cry and cough, and when she was put down, said, "Leave me now. I'm all right. Only it was a terrible shock."

"Madeleine, darling," said young Tom Armstrong, overcoming his disgust, and putting out his hand, in front of everyone.

"Please," she said. "Leave me. Not now."

And got to her feet and staggered farther into the darkness. Her hair had been burned off.

Is this Madeleine? Amy Parker asked without regret. Her novelette was finished.

At this point the holocaust at Glastonbury could have consumed even the spectators, only there were fresh developments. Clouds, hanging above the furnace, began to spill their first heavy drops. A child held out his hand to collect these jewels, and laughed as the big rain fell into his hand. And doubted as the lightning split the bungling fire. And finally cried in terror as thunder crashed and the grey scene of ashes, in which they were all standing, shook.

Storm's broke all right, they laughed, drinking it, and steady-ing themselves against the thunder.

And the water poured down, proving that even fire is im-

potent. People wandered in the rain, themselves rivulets. It ran between the breasts of the women and filled the pockets of the men. They were saved. They smelled the ashes and knew. It was doubtful that there would be a tongue of fire left this side of Bangalay, or on the other, as far as Wullunya.

So the people began to creep back into the world they knew, and from which they had only been forced out by smoke at the openings.

Amy Parker, who had laid hands on her husband again, could have asked him many things.

"Let us go, Stan," she said. "Are the burns bad? We must dress them. Tell me," she said, "do they feel crook?"

"No," he said. "They are not bad."

Wincing as he felt the rain sting the burns on his shoulders and arms. But these were the superficial wounds of the flesh. If he was trembling, it was because he had come out of the fire weak as a little child, and had seen his first faces by flashes of lightning. But he did not return to the woman with whom he had been standing at the head of the stairs. He put this away and did not think about it.

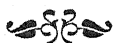
But his wife did, as they walked through the rain.

"She was frightened, poor thing," she said, looking at him through the darkness. "Such an experience."

What this experience was she would have liked to live, and could not. It was nagging at her. What could Stan have said to Madeleine when he found her in the burning house? She longed to take possession of her husband by honest lamplight, and hold his face in her hands, and look into him.

In the meantime the rain poured as they walked, bumping against each other in the darkness, and the flashes of lightning lit her face in which the thoughts turned, but his face was closed.

So she had to be content with the bravery of his act in rescuing the woman from the fire.



Chapter 5

THAT deluge which quenched the fire at Glastonbury was, in fact, the first of the late summer rains, so that the land was not long naked. The charred hills and the black scars of gullies were blurred again with green almost before the people could get out and have a look for what remained. Some people, of course, did not have the courage to return to a framework, and chose to live in other parts of the country, where they imagined the passions of fire could never rise. But those who did go back to their burned-out farms were on the whole glad. The green blur, which was increasing all the time, first in veins and pockets, then spilling over, made them feel young and hopeful. As they hammered and sawed, and rounded their cattle into rough yards of saplings, and untied bundles of fowls bunched together at the legs, they were full of resolutions. Because they had looked into the fire, and seen what you do see, they could rearrange their lives. So they felt.

Mr. Armstrong ordered a new house, just like the old one.

People went up to look at the new house at Glastonbury, though the Armstrongs themselves never went. It was enough to leave it to architects and builders. But they had also, perhaps, been burned a little by the fire, and were afraid to visit the scene while it was still a ruin.

Although they were not seen at Durilgai, Mr. Armstrong did write to Stan Parker, enclosing a handsome reward for his act of bravery, and adding the thanks of the young lady who was to become his son's wife. At least he was *sure*, the butcher said, that the young lady would add her thanks to his, only at that moment she was visiting in another state, for health reasons.

Stan Parker could afford to be a bit disgusted at the cheque, but his wife, who had not experienced exaltation by fire, considered the many things they might buy. In time she persuaded him to share her material pleasure.

Stan Parker, whose burns had soon healed, leaving only a few small scars, took the cheque to Bangalay one day, to bank. Stan had never loved that town, filled with hardware and the yellow jail. But by this time it was his town.

That day he went in search of a man called Moriarty, from whom he had borrowed a few shillings a few weeks before, and who would be found, if true to form, at the Grand Railway Hotel. So Stan went there, into the sour cavern, which on that day for some reason was filled with a momentous air, along with the slops of beer, and the smoke, and the faces. They were discussing some great news which had just reached the flash town, and which threatened temporarily to intimidate it, making its yellow paint and iron lace a degree less flash.

Snatches of this news came at Stan Parker, gradually numbing him as he pressed through the pub, until finally he saw Moriarty and asked, "What's up?"

"Why, don't you know?" said Moriarty, who was several minutes better informed, and for that reason inclined to despise the ignorant. "Why," he said, "a war's just broke out, over the other side."

"Yes," said Bob Fuller, "we're all orf to fight the Hun."

"No bloody fear," said some. "It's too far."

They downed their beer, to fill up quick, and feel better.

"What'll you do, Stan?" somebody asked.

"I don't know," he said.

Which was true. He felt slow.

In spite of moments of true knowledge that came to him, animating his mind and limbs with conviction, telling him of the presence of God, lighting his wife's face when he had forgotten its features, bringing closer and closer a trembling leaf till its veins and vastness were related to all things, from burning sun to his own burned hand—in spite of this, Stan Parker had re-

mained slow with men. It was a kind of unrealized ambition to communicate with them. But so far he had not done this.

And now he said, "I don't know."

He didn't either, though he might soon. Problems resolve themselves, as day eases out of night.

Stan Parker slipped away after a bit and drove home. As he came down the last hill, and saw the paths that his feet had worn round the house, the man supposed that he would go to war.

When she was told, however, his wife Amy Parker went on cutting the bread.

"When will you go, Dad?" asked Ray, who was by now a big small boy, eager for events, so that he hung wide open on receiving the news, and his dinner would not go down.

"Eat your food," his mother said to him, and to her husband, "How do we know that this isn't something that they have made up to talk about in pubs?"

But it was not, Amy Parker knew, and for this reason she threw the plates together harder than usual, and swept the crumbs with more vehemence, and called the fowls and flung the hateful crumbs, after which she looked up and saw that the landscape had survived the first ghastly tremor and resumed its natural glaze.

After Stan had enlisted and it was time for him to go into camp, they all waited for a cart which was to come, for O'Dowd was going too, and a boy was driving them as far as the village where they would meet other enlisted men.

So Parkers waited on the veranda. They were so stiff, it might have been Sunday after dinner.

Just then Ray called that he could see the cart, and there they were too, Mrs. O'Dowd as well, who had come for comfort.

Then it was time to gather up with quick nervousness the few things. Stan Parker kissed his wife. How stiff she was in that white blouse. Some people called her a stout woman. She was not fat, but she was well covered. And now she stood firmly, waiting to be extricated from this enormous event, which she would be, if she waited long enough.

They were all standing. The children without their shoes, which they wore only for church and school. Mrs. O'Dowd, who was by this time quite reduced. They stood and waved even after the cart had stopped taking notice; they waved because they had not yet thought what they should do next. The gentle, soothing rise and fall of hands filled their emptiness.

Stan Parker returned home once on embarkation leave. He was different then. His hair was shorn extra short, and there was a smell of khaki on him even when he went about the place and did his jobs in his ordinary clothes. Sometimes he would sit and wind his puttees, as if he had taken a liking to this ritual, and wind and bind, till he was shrouded.

"You must like all this soldiering," said his wife bitterly. "There is no telling what a man will like, even the one you know best."

"What else should I do?" said Stan Parker. "Run my head against a wall?"

"Do they give you enough to eat, Stan?" she asked. Food, after all, was something you could touch and talk about. "Are you ever hungry?" she asked. "What do they give you?"

"Stew," he said. He looked at a piece of brass he had just polished, that glittered in the lamplight as if it had been precious.

Because it was the last night, and because the mysticism of evasion and self-destruction in which he had been immersed ever since he wore a uniform had finally made her lonely, she asked, "Don't you ever feel lonely, living in tents with a lot of other chaps?"

"How can you feel lonely," he said brutally, "when your thoughts are so close to the thoughts of the next bloke they jog each other? Even on the lavatory."

Then he got up and went outside. It was a cold night of stars. He went up onto a little rise beyond the house, on which a couple of ironbarks stood, the stars shivering in their leaves and branches. Then he too was cold and shivering, his flesh was flapping; he leaned against one of the trees, but it was no support. He would have prayed, but he was afraid at that moment it might not have been answered, nor any prayer.

PATRICK WHITE

So he returned to his wife, who was about all the certainty he had, and she received him with conviction. They clung together as if they were drowning in darkness and would at least sink together. As they reached the depths they no longer cared.

After Stan had gone, together with the other enlisted men, in the public conveyance to Bangalay, with tears and cheers, and a bit of a flag that Mrs. Gage had run up over the post office, it took Amy Parker some time to realize all that had happened. Mercifully she did not cry. She had the cows and the children.

When the years of mud and metal were over, Stan Parker would seldom talk about them. He would not be coaxed into telling the interminable boys' adventure stories, as some men will after wars.

He wrote home, though. Stan Parker sucked his pen until his cheeks grew hollow, thinking of all those things he would not write, but knew. He wrote:

Dear Ame,

. . . I could tell you a thing or two if only I could write it, but then we have never been ones for talk, anyway. I have not, you have done the talking, you have been the tongue of both of us, and how I would like to hear that tongue telling what has happened since dinner time—even if it was disastrous, like the roof blown off, we could always put it on again. I could always do most things with my two hands. That is the terrible part of all this. It is taken out of my hands. I am weak, Amy. . . .

He held his head on one side, and wrote slowly, but surely, once he began. He was a bit excited at himself, writing these letters, of which the words became transformed—they were grass, and slow cows, and the bits of paraphernalia, axes and hammers and wire and things, that lay around a place, and that he liked to remember.

Stan Parker wrote:

My dear Ame,

I have thought it over and it is best for you to spell the Creek paddock after summer, unless it rains real hard this autumn, and

THE TREE OF MAN

divide the herd between the Sally wattle and the Square paddock. I think this is best. And get the oats in if you can, with the help of some man, perhaps that old Skinner with the gammy leg would come from Wullunya if you make it worth his while.

If Ray has blunted the good axe chopping into nails and stones, he must learn to sharpen it. If anything should happen to that axe, I don't know what I would do.

Tom Archer is gone, and Jack Sullivan. They were good men. Tom knew he had it coming for some time, and was changed. Jack Sullivan was a noisy sort of coot, but you could not help liking Jack. He could do a trick with a penny, it was that quick you could not see it, and another with an egg, if he had one, that brought the house down. Well, they are gone.

I sat awhile in a church in one of the villages here last week. It was what remained of a church. It was all sky. There were the frames of the windows, but the glass had fallen. But people come there. There was a priest poking about as if the roof was on. There was a wind blowing, and rain, and dogs coming in. I could have sat there forever doing nothing. I could listen and watch and think of home. Good God, Amy, it is a long time, but there is a lot that has been longer. There was an old woman in that church, skin and bone, praying as if she had just begun to pray. She could have told a thing or two. But we cannot speak, we can only look at each other.

Durilgai did not suffer from the war. In some houses, certainly, women ached for their husbands, and some women who were afraid of the silence or interested in variety went out and took other men, sleeping with these with varying degrees of guilt or appetite, and some women were crushed as if they had been empty eggshells when news came that their men had been killed, and some ate the potatoes they sowed, and would have gone hungry but for these and the milk they pulled out of some old horny cow. But Durilgai was not touched, by and large, because it was a long way away, and besides, in those parts the earth predominated over the human being. The grass still grew and bent in the wind. The hot wind still blew from the west, and the cold from the south, and the languid, moist breezes came in from the east, from the sea.

Once Ray Parker shot a gull, and took it quickly, and hid it,

because his mother would have been annoyed. He buried it in the gully, after he had ripped it open, to see. He would have liked to do something memorable and heroic, but as he could not think of anything great enough, and yet within his reach, he had shot at the gull.

"Shall I go out to work when Dad comes home?" the boy asked.

"I expect so," said the mother. "You can't hang around forever. What do you want to do?"

"I don't know," he said sullenly.

He slashed at the air with his knife. Because he did not know, he wandered in the paddocks, and cut his name into green trees, and made stones skim on water, and put his hand into the secret depths of nests and stole the jewels of eggs.

He did not want these much. He wanted the souvenirs of dead Germans that his father would bring. He wanted to wear the steel helmet, and would charge through the dusk to challenge strangers.

"Ray," called his mother, because it was time she asserted herself, and stood there wiping her hands on her apron to do so, "can't you stop mooning about and do something useful, and chop a bit of wood?"

He did so, silently.

When he brought her the armful of wood, with his face closed above it, he reminded her of her husband, whose letters she had tied with a piece of string and stuck behind the tea canister. She tried sometimes to remember her husband in such minute detail that she would make him stand before her. But she could not. Outside her love for him, which was real and permeating, he was by this time vague. Most often she remembered him lifting his leg over the side of the cart, getting in to sit beside O'Dowd, when they were leaving for the war. His back was turned to her.

"Come here," she said when the boy had let the wood fall in the box beside the stove.

"What is it?" he asked suspiciously.

"Give me a kiss," she said laughingly.

"Oh, why?" whined the lumpish boy.

He dragged his cold cheek away from her face, and bit his lip, and looked hot.

"What good is it?" he said.

"No," she said, "I suppose it is not much *good*."

And she began to sort some clothes she had washed, and to sprinkle them with water, and to roll them into bundles.

When the children were at school she would go down to the edge of the road, about midday, and stand in the steady but not oppressive sunlight of those early autumn days, waiting to see who would pass. People would talk to the woman by the road, and tell her about their relations, their ailments, their animals, and about their dead. They would take the woman into their confidence, because her face was asking for it. Sometimes they would even tell her thoughts they had just had, that they would not have told their families, but they would never see this woman again. And the woman thought about all she had been told, which filled what would have been an emptiness. She entered into the strangers' lives, as she strolled in the garden afterwards, picking off the dead heads of flowers. She entered into their lives, forming relationships of sympathy, and even passion, which nobody would ever have surprised her into admitting. So that in this way her husband's absence became reduced to a dull unhappiness. It was there. But sometimes she did not stop to think of the cause. Her surroundings, of sunlight and dappled bark, and her relationships with the departed strangers, were too vivid, far more vivid, indeed, than the strangers themselves, or the natural landscape.

In time Stan Parker came home. Through some postal delay he was unannounced, and walked down the road carrying his pack and the helmet he had brought for the boy, and came in early one afternoon, and said, "Well, I got here, Amy, at last."

Because it was unexpected, and she had been engaged on one or two jobs of urgency and importance, his wife gave him quite a small kiss, which was different from what she had imagined and rehearsed, and began almost at once to tell him about a hinge

that had come loose on a door, and by which she had become obsessed in her unsuccessful efforts to screw it tight.

"All right," he said. "We'll see about it. But later. There's plenty of time now. For everything."

There was, it seemed, on that afternoon. The house stood open. Great carpets of golden light were spread on the floors. Bees passed through the windows and out the other side of the peaceful house, in which the man and woman had sat and begun to look at each other.

"You'll have to tell me all about it," she said shyly as he sat drinking the tea she had poured, and making noises because it was still too hot.

He pulled his mouth down in defence. "Give us a chance," he said.

But she did not intend to hold him to it.

She was not, in fact, interested. She believed only in the life they had lived together, and would now begin to live again.

"How are the kids?" he asked, to break the silence.

"They're good," she said. "They're leggy now. Thelma puts her hair up sometimes for fun. Then she looks real grown-up. But she's too sorry for herself. She's got that asthma. Oh, she'll be all right, I suppose. She'll have to go from here. And Ray. They'll both go. Ray is a strong boy. Violent sometimes. He won't let you touch him. I could love Ray, Stan, if he would let me. I could make him into something, but he is ashamed of gentleness."

The father did not reveal that he no longer believed anything can be effected by human intervention. Instead, he listened with foreboding to the tale of the children he still had to meet. He burned his mouth with the tea, and looked across at his wife, animated by her love for their children, and realized she was the stronger for her knowledge of them. He would look to her to do something. She would stand between them. So he felt better.

So the afternoon was passing, towards the return of the children, and the procession of the cows. The man and woman began to look at each other with less strain and more compassion. The woman was no longer ashamed to touch her husband's hand,

which she had wanted to do for some time. Now she took it and looked at it as it lay, and chafed it with her own burning one, and bound it to her again with the bones of her fingers. So they were reunited at last. Their mouths and their souls were open to each other. They could not press closer than they did, their closed eyes admitting no barrier of flesh to this complete mingling.

The days after war unfolded slowly but headily at Durilgai. Stan Parker went about his work again. His head was sometimes sunk, as if peace were too heavy. He was older, of course. He began to put on weight.

He was a grey man now, of strength, but also great mildness. His eyes were lost in hopefulness. In that peacetime he was still diffident of accepting anything as solid, factual, or what is called permanent.

Armstrongs came once or twice to Durilgai after Stan Parker returned. They came in a motorcar, high up, and did not speak to people that they met, not out of pride, but because they preferred never to stay long in any one place, since young Tom Armstrong was killed, who had been a lieutenant and mentioned in dispatches and decorated.

When the Armstrongs came to Durilgai they would drive to Glastonbury, where they never lived now, because it had not been finished. The men had been withdrawn when the news was received of young Tom's death, so that the staircase continued to open into the sky, and mortar hardened into rocks where it had been mixed, and people had stolen the loose bricks on dark nights. The old Armstrongs would take a turn or two in the deserted garden, and Mrs. Armstrong would still look for scars of the terrible fire, and would stand where the beds had once existed under the milk thistles and the cow-itch, to tear the roses from their bushes in guilty handfuls. Great handfuls of her own roses. Then Armstrongs would return in their motorcar, for the afternoon breeze blew dangerously on the hill at Glastonbury.

Stan Parker once had cause to go to Glastonbury, after that big Muscovy duck, that flew from the pen because they had de-

layed cutting its wing, though they had talked about it often enough. The duck made straight for Glastonbury, to stalk and hide in its wilderness, and to endure all kinds of frights and elements in order to preserve its illusion of freedom. Stan Parker went up the hill in pursuit, parting the tall weeds, so that the seed flew from them, and the dusk was floating with a fine down. Where the gardenia grove had been, and was still, only sickly and unrecognizable, with pale leaves and buds that had clotted and rotted into wads of brown paper, he stooped and picked up a bundle of old letters. These also were pale and mouldy. Their secrets were more secret in the faint but firm hand of some man, it looked, who had dipped his pen and said what he wanted to.

How Stan Parker wanted to read the sodden letters in the suffocating grove and discover something that he did not know! There is always a guilty yearning for anonymous advice that makes the hands tremble. So he was prepared to immerse himself in guilt and knowledge, if he had not remembered Tom Armstrong, whether the letters were his or not. He threw them down then and went inside the half-finished house.

Unreason abounded in the identical twin of the house that had been burned. Some swaggie had camped there once in the twin of the room in which the tapestry had hung. Vines had taken possession of the half-built staircase. The man stood at the top, as high as he could go, and from his vantage of vines looked out, and wondered about Tom Armstrong's girl. She had not been heard of, neither married, nor dancing; Madeleine had vanished.

Then Stan Parker leaned his head against the unfinished brickwork and thought quite distinctly how he would finish this unfaithfulness to his wife if the opportunity occurred. Now the dispassionate evening allowed him no feeling of guilt. Under the wide sky, thickening into night, at the top of the deserted, desecrated house, vines crumpled in his hands with a fleshiness, a soft muskiness of flesh. Only he could not remember enough. He could not remember the pores of her skin, the veins in her eyes, her breath on his neck, however hard he tried to. Whole rooms of his mind, in which each separate detail had been stored,

seemed to have gone, like those rooms of the top and most significant story, through which he had run, matching himself against the bravura of the fire, to find her, as he had not expected in his youth and diffidence, awake.

Now the middle-aged man stood crumpling the vines at the top of the ugly house. Unpleasant lines had come in his face, almost of consummation. But nobody would see, of course, because the place was quite deserted. Except for the duck, that was stalking heavily in the undergrowth, showing its yellow eye. Why, he had come there for the duck, he realized, crumpling the hot vines, and glad of a reason.

So he swore at the bird. "I'll get that bastard," he said.

While the duck continued to stalk, the man ran down and out at the back, his large body grown ridiculous as it hurtled far outside his recollections. Then he recovered himself and his breath, picked up a long branch of a tree that wind had torn off, and that he noticed lying, rushed at the now desperately regretful duck, and pressed it to the ground with the fork of the branch, pressed as if he would crush the bird through the earth, out of existence, rather than take it alive.

"Got the bastard!" he exploded.

The man turned back and began to go down the hill. He walked in the tracks he had already made, through the flattened weed. Nobody would know of any spasm of lust on that evening, which was already growing cold, it was autumn.

So Stan Parker walked home with his recaptured duck, and felt the cold begin to creep through the sweat beneath his clothes, and an uneasiness in one shoulder that had overreached itself.

When he got in he went to his wife's workbox, and took a pair of scissors, and hacked through the satiny but coarse feathers of one of the duck's wings.

"That'll fix it," she said, looking up calmly through the glasses she had taken to wearing for close work.

He only grunted, and went in the dark to throw the duck into its pen.



Chapter 6

NOT LONG AFTER the war Stan Parker bought a motor-car, and they felt they had come a long way. Stan learned to drive his car with pride, if not with ease. When Parkers drove out, Amy Parker put on her hat with more than usual formality, and streaked some powder on her face, and took a handbag with lozenges and things. Some neighbours looked and smiled from their verandas; others turned away in anger and pretended that they did not see.

Sometimes Stan would take the car and drive out quickly before his wife could ask him where he was going. He could feel that she had run out from the house, and was standing in her clean apron watching the car as it disappeared. But he did not look back and wave, or shout an explanation, because he did not know yet where he was going. He drove down sandy side roads, along which, except for the fact that the road did exist, there seemed no reason why human beings should go. It was too sour in that part of the bush, or too pure, to suggest prospects of gain or possibilities of destruction.

Stan Parker would draw up in those parts. He would roll a cigarette. He liked to be there. He would sit with his hands on the still wheel, till their dried-up skin had disintegrated in the light of sand and grey leaf, so that his body was no longer surprised at the mystery of stillness, of which he was a part. If his wife continued to stand, in his mind, beside the house in her clean apron, with the anxious and thwarted look on her face, it did not avail her for the moment; he could not have done much to answer her poignance with rational assurances, or even the deceptive gestures of the body.

So he forgot about her for the time being, knowing that he

would return to her, to share their habitual life. Stretching himself finally on the creaking seat of the frail car, till his bones cracked, he would long to express himself by some formal act of recognition, give a shape to his knowledge, or express the great simplicities in simple, luminous words for people to see.

There were individuals who said Stan Parker had gone a bit queer from the war, after all he had been through, and him a husband and a father. Now these people began to avoid him.

Once he had told his boy to get into the car, and said that they would go for a drive. Where? Well, just to those parts to which he had grown attached, he could not say it was anywhere particular. The boy was naturally embarrassed, and sat looking at the sober speedometer or gloomily out at the side of the road.

But Stan was full of hope. Now I must speak to this boy, he felt, and convey to him something of what I know.

"This is pretty poor country," said the father. "Sour. But I sort of like it. It gets a hold over you."

"I don't know what we've come here for," said the boy, looking with gloomy distaste at the bushland.

Although he had never seen a city he longed for it. Much of his unhappiness was due to the fact that he had not discovered the herd.

"Aren't we going to do something?" the boy asked.

"I just wanted to go for a drive," said the father, "and have a talk."

"About what?" asked the boy, who was suspicious, thinking it might be some explanation of sex.

"Nothing in particular," said the father. "I haven't seen you since I got back."

"What can I do?" complained the boy. "Hang about all the time?"

He now definitely disliked his father. He even disliked the smell of him, which was the smell of the soldier, steadier men of that age, smelling of tobacco and work, of their regular and reliable bodies. For a moment the father had excited him, at the return, with his rough khaki tunic open at the neck, but it was perhaps more the excitement of the barbarous and foreign

objects he had brought with him, the little polished grenade and the sullen helmet, from the head of a dead German.

But this was already some time ago. Ray was a bigger boy. He had grown at the wrists. And the helmet had been dented; the grenade lost. There beneath that tree, under which they had pulled up, the man and the boy were resenting each other for their separateness.

Not without sadness and a sense of his own failure, the father said, "I'm going to smoke a cigarette, if you want to poke about a bit."

There was nothing else the boy could do, except continue to sit beside his father, which would of course have been intolerable. So he got down, slamming the tinny door of their car.

There was a lizard amongst the stones that the man saw, and to which his attention now clung with the hope of the hopeless. As if he might suddenly interpret for his son, by some divine dispensation, with such miraculous clarity and wisdom, the love and wonder the horny lizard had roused in him. That day could still become transparent, which remained opaque.

"Look, Ray," said the man, looking along his own pointing finger, that just did not tremble for its daring tactic.

"What?" said the boy. "Oh, that's only an old lizard. There are plenty of them."

"Yes," said the father. "But I like to watch it. I like to look at these things."

The lizard closed his eye, shutting it up in its pocket of stone. Then the man was really alone. He began to roll a cigarette, and to lick at the thin paper with his dry tongue. That part of the bush was very grey. Its symbols would not be read.

It was to the boy, wandering apathetically through the scrub, the same monotonous bushland that his youth had become. He was perpetually wandering through bush, hacking or scratching, looking for birds or something to kill.

Ah, if he could escape, he said, bending a sapling till it broke. And do what? He thought that he would become a policeman. He remembered the admirably virile leggings of the young police

constable, Murphy, who had shot at a man and killed him, they said, that was wanted for the murder of a rabbit out Wullunya way.

Ray Parker took aim with a stick. He could have shot the fugitive as cleanly as Murphy, if with less righteousness. His eyes were not blue. They were a deep brown, which did not yet suggest what they were looking at, or perhaps it was just inward, at those images of himself in a variety of postures, in leggings or without, or naked, clothed in a brooding nakedness that was both fascinating and awful.

Stan Parker finally decided to apprentice his son to old Jarman the saddler at Bangalay, to see, he said, though what would be seen he was not quite sure; the move was more than anything a lame answer to his own puzzlement. Stan's mother had had a cousin a saddler, a decent man. Leather was honest.

"Ah, why, Dad?" said the disgusted boy, his throat protesting desperately. "Who wants old saddlery? I don't."

"What do you want?" asked the father.

"Not that," said the boy, because he did not know how to make a more concrete answer.

"Try it anyway for a bit," said the father. "There's always room for a couple of saddlers in a town of any size."

The boy held his tongue.

Soon he was at Jarman's in a calico apron, sweeping up the snippets through the too heavy sunlight. At slacker times Mr. Jarman made him sit on a stool at his side, and cut the simpler shapes, and learn to sew with waxed thread. It was heavy in the shop on those afternoons, filled with the smell of wax and new leather. Ray Parker did not think he could endure the full extent of monotony that he had found in place of life. As he heard time pass, the boy stroked his flat belly and looked at himself. He was confident that he would achieve anything if the opportunity offered itself. But would it?

Ray came home seldom now, only sometimes on a Sunday. He found the house a bit lopsided and, in spite of his childhood, un-

familiar. The fowls in the yard moved out of his way more precipitately, it seemed. And his mother called him to do little jobs that she had invented, to have him there, to command him, to look into his eyes, to examine the pores of his skin, to break open his sealed mind through the deaf-and-dumb show of gesture that human beings carry on. At this period she treated him with a brisk friendliness, that would not admit he had escaped her but at the same time was rather desperate. Much as he disliked Bangalay, this was worse, and he would escape soon, walking up the road in long pants, to stand at a corner with other youths, or often at the signpost, waiting for the time to pass, or something come.

They had taken a room for him at Bangalay in the house of an old Mrs. Northcott, whose husband, now dead, had been a railway official. It was a small, decent house, thickly pasted with brown paint. It had an elderbush on one side, and a smell of sink water. Life at Mrs. Northcott's was predominantly brown.

That Sunday, Ray Parker got the bus early. He walked down the road from the post office at Durilgai, where the whole landscape led down to Parkers'.

His sister, who was combing her hair at the window, looked up, and made it obvious she no longer believed in his existence.

"This is a surprise for you," he said, so as not to appear deterred.

"I hope it is a pleasant one," she said, and threw from her the pale hair that she took from the comb.

Thelma Parker was an older girl now, who could remove her secret life into protective corners, and for this reason was more irritated than upset by her brother's visit. She wore a ring now, too small to proclaim itself as cheap, and would bathe herself frequently, and powder her skin, and press her best blouses, till such neatness and cleanliness became oppressive, even insulting. Her parents had decided that Thelma should start next term at a College for Business Girls in the city. They were impressed by, rather than fond of her.

"Ray is here," Thelma said now, passing through the kitchen. She did not express her disgust with more than one petal. Her

camellia graces were not of the generous, blowing order, but tight and small, greenish-white.

The whole family was a bit aghast that something unforeseen should happen on that day. The mother, who had abandoned system on Sunday morning, was dawdling in her felt slippers. The father was reading Saturday's paper. But they said, Ah, Ray is here.

Of course they loved their son, only they were off their guard. The mother was even caught at the throat by the love she had for him, its quick spasm surprising her by its strength. The father cleared his throat, and rattled the newspaper, and looked desperately from column to column, hoping to find in a moment and few words the secret of life, which he was long overdue in offering to his son.

But by this time the youth was cocking his leg over the window sill, and was coming in through the congested canes of a white rose, which his parents had once planted, and which had practically taken possession of the house. He was extricating himself in a shower of papery petals. An old bird's nest fell. Then he emerged, looking red but rational.

"That's no way to come into the room, Ray," said the father.

"But it's the quickest," said the son logically.

All that day he was on the defensive, though in the morning, as he came down the road with the wind behind him, things had been clear. It was not so much in himself. He had genuinely wanted to see his family and feel himself part of it. But the sadder lights of afternoon prevailed, the trees darkening, and the dead colours of grass. In the afternoon a wind got up, and handfuls of brown grass were blown aimlessly by the gusts of wind, eddying in the sour back yard amongst the clumps of ruffled hens.

For a while he roamed in the paddock. Thistles had sprung up since he was there last, and there were places in which he had to walk carefully.

Returning to the house, he saw that his sister, whose prettiness and pale hair, as she stood at the window that morning, combing and dreaming, should never have been destroyed, had now

grown thin and ugly. She was seated at the same window, sorting some of her possessions, girls' things, and had pinned paper round her sleeves, as she had seen the postmistress do. This is not for me, felt the boy. The paper sleeves alone told him that. So he continued to tread clumsily round the house, and Thelma frowned and did not see him.

"Look, Ray," said his mother, coming up against him unexpectedly, which made her breathless, for she was not quite ready, "I found this little notebook the other day. It was given to me years ago by a parson's wife, I think. I never wrote in it, because I don't write easily. Did you ever keep a diary? Some people do. I thought you might like to try. Then you could send it to me at the end of the year, and I could read what you have done."

It was a silly idea, and not quite fair. She had thought of it on the spur of the moment, as a means of approach. The boy looked as if he was going to be sick.

"Pffh," he said. "I don't want to keep a diary. What am I going to put? What I had for breakfast!"

He continued round the side of the house, and she followed him patiently.

"I only thought," she said.

The more stupidly she behaved, the more desperate she was to retrieve the situation. And it did seem to her that she could only behave stupidly towards her children. She remembered how, as a young woman, she had looked inside their minds and seen their desires, or they had brought her their thoughts without disguises.

"Are you happy, Ray?" she asked when they had stumbled inside the kitchen, for it seemed there was nowhere else they could go, there was no real escaping from each other, except in the end by the boy's actual, and what she feared would be his natural, flight. "Are you happy?" she asked.

He was too young and callow to realize that this was a means of telling him she was not.

"What do you mean, *happy*?" he asked lumpishly.

"I would like to think," she said, "you were getting the most out of life. It's only natural, as you are my son. I have been very happy," she said.

She did tell herself with conviction.

"I only want to be left alone," he said.

The dark shapes of trees were altering all the time, combed into long tresses by wind. It would rain soon probably.

"But Ray," she said, leaning on the table.

Thelma came in, throwing back the leaf of the door with ease. "Aren't we going to have some tea?" she asked loudly. She looked in the mirror to watch herself speak, and was pleased with what she saw, for that moment anyway.

"Yes," said the mother, as if wondering why she had not thought of this solution. "Shall we bake a few scones?"

"We?" asked Thelma, wrinkling up her face in a way that was both pretty and amusing. "My scones are always sods."

While her mother took flour, she brought the more agreeable things, and particularly the cake, which she had iced herself in pink sugar.

"Did you hear about the College, Ray?" she asked, beginning to set the more important crockery that they used on Sundays.

"No," he said thickly. "Oh, I heard something."

He would go from here to that alternative, Mum Northcott's, from which he must go in turn. At night the streets are filled with the desperate echoes of departing footsteps.

"Next term," she was saying. "I am going to board in Randwick with the Bourkes. Mrs. Bourke is a relative of Dad's. They had a quarrel or something, but it is made up."

"It was not a quarrel," said the mother. "People often fade out, leaving you to guess the reason, and there's always many."

"Anyway," said Thelma, "I shall go to the city. I'm a bit afraid, Ray. I shall have a season ticket, and travel by tram from Randwick every day. Mrs. Gage knows people too, who will invite me. They have a small-goods business. They are quite rich. Mrs. Gage is helping with a dress. It is a beige dress, with little tucks and a pleated skirt."

Ray looked out of the window. He was struggling with a sense of injustice. "What'll you do then?" he asked, not yet decided what form his insult, or self-defence, should take. "In your beige dress?"

"Why," she said, flushing, "I shall pass the necessary exams, in typing and shorthand, and take a job, with a stockbroker or solicitor, something like that. And make something of my life," she added smoothly.

"And marry some bloke," he said.

"I'm not thinking of anything like that."

"And play the pianner," he laughed, "while he brings the dough home."

His rich, metallic laughter, that he had discovered all of a sudden how to make, rocked him regularly, and he liked the feeling of it. He had a strong throat and rather heavy eyelids. He sat looking out of the window at skeins of grey rain that were being flung across the paddocks, and black trees restrained so far by their roots.

"What's she done to deserve this?" asked the mother.

"Nothing," he said, quietening. "Only you get fed up."

"Because you get fed up, I am to pay for it," said the girl.

Self-pity made her mince with a new gentility, that was perhaps instinctive. Her skin had the soapiness of righteousness.

Now the rain wrapped the trees and house with grey sheets, folding and falling. If you had not heard it, this rain would have appeared quite solid. But the sound of rain and wind and spitting fire dispersed the illusion of solid rain, of all solidity even.

The boy began to be afraid of this isolation, to which it all boiled down in the end. He longed to substitute movement for his fears, so he got up presently and went from the kitchen.

As a lull had come in the rain, Ray Parker made his getaway from the place that had been his home. He went up the road with his head down and his hands in his pockets. The emotions that had been knotting in him actively all that afternoon had settled down, at least temporarily, into a passive coil.

The parents took it for granted that something like this must happen, and were grateful that it was not more bewildering. Until they were asked for information, first from old Mrs. Northcott, then from Mr. Jarman the saddler, on the whereabouts and intentions of their son.

It appeared that Ray had gone.

He wrote soon, a letter from Brisbane, in which he said:

Dear Mum,

I come up here on the spur of the moment, and think I have done right to make the move.

I am working on a steamer on this coast. I am working in the galley. The cook is a Chinaman, but clean. He gave me a piece of pearl shell with some carving on it, that I will keep for you, it is what you will like.

Well, cheer up, Mum. Nothing is for always, though there is life enough on the coastal run. I wake up at night and see the cranes loading up, or else it is horses driven up the race. I could go to the Territory if I like with a gentleman who made me an offer as a hand on a station, but I don't think that I will. I will look around.

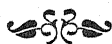
When the father was handed this letter to read he said, "It is natural, Amy."

He remembered his own youth, and how whichever steps he had taken were hardly determined by himself. But this was not what his wife would have wanted to hear.

She said, "That is all very well for you. You have not had the trouble." Her voice swelled up for the injustice of it, and because she was taken unawares.

For he had gone, slipping from her as easily and naturally as the seed from the pod, to become lost in the long grass. If she suffered a great spasm at the moment of realization, with lesser ones recurring over many days, it was more perhaps for her vanity, though she did remember the little stubbly-headed boy in short trousers, and the baby gorging itself with placid confidence on her breast. So she cried at times, mostly at dusk, standing at a window, when shapes have grown tender, and she herself was disintegrating, and sucked onward, the years streaming behind her. It was frightening then.

I have paid too much attention to Ray and not enough to Thelma, said Amy Parker, rousing herself. After all, a girl is more reliable than a boy.



Chapter 7

WHEN Thelma left for Sydney and the College for Business Girls, the mother packed her daughter's case. She put in a sachet that she had made for the occasion, and some packets of chocolate in case her girl felt hungry at night; she would eat with gratitude, rustling the silver paper, and think of her mother.

The last night Amy Parker went into her girl's room, and put her mouth in the long pale hair, and held her, and said, "Who'd have thought, Thel, all by yourself in the city, but you must not worry."

"I'll be all right, Mum," said the cool girl, taken by surprise and anxious to extricate herself. "Besides, there will be Mrs. Bourke. Dad says she was a good sort, in spite of the misunderstanding there was at that time about some things."

"Oh yes, there'll be Mrs. Bourke," said Amy Parker. "But it won't be the same as home."

Thelma caught the train in Bangalay, in a grey suit and neat hat. She never showed any nervousness in public. Her parents, who had brought her to town in the Ford, stood beside the window of the compartment, and wondered about things. The father did not struggle, because the situation was being taken out of his hands. For a long time, though, the mother put up a show of authority and advice, till it was time to bow her head, under the large dark hat. Then the children do take over, she was forced to admit. She received on her mouth with gratitude, even humility, the last kiss, wondering if it signified love; she would have liked to believe this.

So Thelma Parker came to the city, and went to the College for Business Girls, and became efficient. She was as cool as the

bell on the typewriter that rang at the end of the line. She would fling the roller back, just not angrily, but disdainfully, looking at nonexistent objects at the far end of the room. Her paper was always spotless. She was, indeed, very clean. Her long, slightly oval nails were pink, and she smelled of lavender water, which she kept in a drawer of her desk and sprinkled discreetly on her clean hands. On her thin white wrist she wore a small gold watch, cheap but in good taste. Her skin was very white, almost unhealthy. She loved the city, she said, translating its garishness into a personal poetry. Were not its asphalt and metal a mark of her own progress?

Horrie Bourke, who had married Stan Parker's relative, with whom Thelma boarded, was a trainer of racehorses. He was an honest man and consequently had not succeeded as he might have. Even so, he had known some good wins, and had bought diamonds for his wife, and a fox fur.

Horrie Bourke said that Thelma must make herself at home. He gave her a box of chocolates the second day, with a big pink satin bow, and said she could pick out an occasional soft one specially for him. He was the kind of man who likes to practise an elaborate ritual of courtliness with girls.

Mrs. Bourke had been a Bott. She was Lilian, one of those three girls to whom Stan Parker did not propose, and for that reason she developed a habit of screwing up her eyes at Thelma, to look a little closer.

How do you like Mrs. Bourke? You do not say, Thelma's mother wrote.

Mrs. Bourke is all right, she is very kind, wrote Thelma to her mother.

Mrs. Bourke approached her powder to Thelma's face and told her she must call her Aunt Lily. But Thelma decided she would not be trapped into calling her by a Christian name. She did not think she wanted a permanent cosiness of Bourkes, already feeling she was dedicated to some higher form of discomfort.

When Thelma Parker graduated from the business college she

very quickly got a job as junior typist with a shipping firm. It was not what she wanted, but it would do for then. Soon it became apparent that she was most efficient. Special bits of work were given her, with the result that she was hated by those who did not want to do it. But she was undeterred.

She did just think about her home sometimes, eating her anchovette sandwich, for instance, in the half-hour she took off for lunch. The discomfort of such thoughts distressed her but could not be avoided. Her mother persisted, who deserved really all affection and compassion, in spite of the ugliness of her clothes and clumsiness of most things that she did, continually knocking over buckets and pots, or cutting herself as she shredded a cabbage. Her father was a man, therefore of less account, except economically. Her father was given to abstractions, so his face indicated, and in that wrestling was defeated, and for that reason could be despised. Besides, she did not understand what needs her father had. She despised and feared what she did not understand. Till she remembered that her father's neck was shrivelling up. So she was pulled back. Thelma did not think about her brother at all. She closed a lid on him, and persuaded herself he was not just choosing his own time to burst out.

Several nice people had found Thelma Parker nice. There were the Goughs, those friends, or, more likely, acquaintances, of the postmistress at Durilgai. The Goughs lived in a better suburb, though not the best, with quantities of shining furniture. The Goughs gave evening parties, nothing formal, but bridge rolls and semi-evening dress. Thelma soon knew what to do. She had the gift of looking all ways, of assuming correct attitudes, as if her limbs were wax to the moment, of conjuring phrases, as if they had sprung from her own throat and not someone else's. She was doing all this, exhilarated by so many discoveries, possibilities, and surprises.

One Sunday at Bourkes' an elderly but important grazier, after feeling his horse's fetlocks and discussing prospects with the trainer, complimented Thelma Parker on her looks. It was, of course, silly. But she remembered how his boots shone, and that his suit, however carelessly worn, was of expensive stuff. She

remembered that his name was Letourneur, although she did not see him again.

Buffing her nails at the window at Bourkes', Thelma had many things to think about, and watch, as the horses were led up and down, or pawed at their doors in the evening, and snuffled dustily. Some of the boys hung around in the evening, to fool or play at cards or toss coins. Nobody spoke to Horrie Bourke's stuck-up sort of relative, except when it was necessary, and then calling her Miss. Never taking liberties. Except blowing a raspberry from a distance, which could, of course, have been an expression of *joie de vivre*.

There was Curly, though.

Thelma had begun to be impressed by the way she was arranging her life—they had given her a rise at the office and she had bought the half-coat in dyed lapin—when Curly spoke to her.

"I got a message for yer from your brother," he said.

"From my brother? How do you know my brother?"

"Ar!" he said. "I seen im Saturday at Warwick Farm."

"It can't be my brother. My brother is up North."

"He come South, see, recently."

"I can't believe you know my brother."

"Aren't you the sister of Ray Parker?"

"Yes," she said. "But—"

"Ray says, 'Tell Thel I'll be out one of these days to pay a social call.'"

She sat thinking. She was a thin girl in a window, disturbed by the thought that something might intrude beyond the sill into the shadowy privacy of her room.

"Well," said the boy, "I'd a thought you would a been pleased to see yer brother."

"Oh," she said, "I shall be pleased."

But she pushed back her chair. For several days she was off her food. She wondered whether she should write and tell her mother that Ray was now in town. She did not write, though, for wondering what she should say, and then Ray came.

"I am Ray Parker," he said on the step.

"Well, now," said Mrs. Bourke, "you are like your father, or is it your mother? I wonder. Your sister will be pleased, she is just in."

"You are Cousin Lil?" he asked with a tentative smile, of a rough but somewhat practised charm.

"I am a sort of cousin," admitted Mrs. Bourke.

"Dad often speaks about you," he said.

"Oh," she laughed, believing it because she had been told. "It is good to talk about the old times."

He might have insinuated himself still further into her graces, but she was fat and ugly.

Thelma met her brother in the lounge. They sat together on the Bourkes' furniture, feeling its pressure during the silences. Ray would stay in Sydney, it appeared. He had a job with a bookie, as his clerk. The money was not bad. Still, he was looking around.

Presently, Horrie Bourke came in, and had to meet the young man, his relative.

"You are a fine feller," said Horrie, putting his arm in its shirt-sleeve, with the elastic-metal armband, along the shoulder of this young man. "A fine feller. And one that your dad can be proud of."

Then Lilian Bourke came in. She had had a quick dash at her face in the bedroom, and they would open a couple of bottles of stout, she said, as a little celebration for Stan's son.

The Bourkes were very pleased with Ray. They looked at him devouringly; they were hungry for his youth. They pleaded for anecdotes.

Ray was embarrassed. He looked shyly into his full glass. He told them one or two. Obviously he had begun to like best to talk about horses with the old man. He asked Horrie about Egg-cup's chances for the Gold Plate.

When Ray went away the Bourkes longed for him to come again. Which he did. He came quite often. They were all three in the grip, it seemed, of a fresh and stimulating, almost a passionate relationship.

"Your brother is not a bit the boy we expected," Lily Bourke said to Thelma. "Your father was always a slow one. Oh, we all liked Stan. But slow. It was your mother who married him, we all said."

"It is difficult to say what Ray is like," said Thelma. "I am prejudiced by being his sister, I suppose."

"You are a funny girl, Thelma," Lilian said.

At that time Ray was still associated with Bernie Abrahams, the book, whom nobody had met yet, because Bourkes did not go for bookies. None of Ray's mob found their way to Bourkes'. Ray lived somewhere above a fruit shop. There was talk of some Italians, and two Italian girls, sisters, it appeared. Ray brought the Bourkes paper bags filled with big pale apples, or the purple foaming ones, or the head of a pineapple sticking out at the top.

Horrie was pleased, like a child, but Lily was less pleased, who had had time to recover a little from her love.

"That boy is too good to us," said Lily, screwing up her eyes. "Why should a boy be so good?"

"Well, what is wrong?" said Horrie, peeling an apple. "The boy is away from home, he misses his dad and mum."

Thelma had come into the room to look for some belonging, and went out again with the quietness of discretion she used in that house. She was passing through their lives. The men and boys were talking of some big meeting for which the horses were being prepared. It was esoteric talk, of weights and anatomy and odds and paces, to which the girl did not listen, except as fragments fell and unavoidably were picked up. That Eggcup was a cert, they said, for Horrie Bourke, his big chance.

Eating soft eggs at breakfast, the old trainer trembled over the importance of this race. Then for a moment the girl did see not so much the pathos of men's fragile lives as the pathos of her own in similar isolation and unimportance. She bit her mouth, and asked, "When is this race then?"

"What?" he said incredulously. "The race! Why, Saturdee."

Shocked by the discovery that he might not exist, he scraped up jam and opened and closed his mouth once or twice.

"Where is your brother?" he asked. "We ain't seen him since I don't know when."

"I don't know where Ray is," she said. "He has never told me much about his business."

She also had not seen him, she realized, with satisfaction or mistrust, not even in the yard with Curly.

So she wondered why Ray did not come, and there it was Saturday, it was the day of that race for which Horrie Bourke lived.

On the day Thelma did not go to the races. She never went, because when the house was dead, then she lived. She would take off her dress, and improvise on the walnut piano, or write in her diary, and make cups of tea. That day she was extended on the lounge room settee in a position of luxury and abandonment, foreign to her rather precise nature, but instinctive now as she practised that life of discernment and privacy which she would later lead.

When Mrs. Bourke came in. "I will tell you, Thelma," she said, "but first I must lay down."

So Thelma waited, full of misgiving, for she avoided all passionate events, and this must be one, as Lily Bourke was puce.

"It was a cruel day," said Lilian Bourke at last, flat, in her slip and her stockings. "I will tell you, Thelma, what happened."

So Thelma listened, and later that evening, after thinking it over, wrote a letter to her mother.

Dear Mum,

I am writing to tell you what has happened here. It is in the papers, so you will have to know, and better from me than some kind friend. Mum, it is about Ray. He has been mixed up in a racing scandal. He has been, and he has not, that is, for they cannot pin it on him. But it is pretty obvious from what they say. You know how you can only feel about Ray, there is not always proof.

Anyway, you may have heard of the big race, the Gold Plate, that was run today, and which Mr. Bourke's horse Eggcup was supposed to win. Well, it did not. It appears that the horse was somehow interfered with. There has been talk of dope even, and

an inquiry is being held. A strapper from the stable, a raw sort of boy, who was a friend of Ray's has more or less confessed to giving something to the horse, but under the influence of Ray. The boy is in a great state, but will just not say enough. It appears that the winner of the race, an outsider called Sir Murgatroyd, was backed by Ray for a lot of money. . . .

Two days later, events and a suspicion that she was the martyr inspired Thelma to write again:

. . . We have not seen Ray since all this happened, not that Mr. Bourke would allow him on the place. Mrs. Bourke has been sick, I have had her in bed, nursing her at night and working by day is no fun. She is letting her hair grow out, she is so upset. As for Mr. Bourke, it has turned him into an old man, who was always so full of kindness for Ray, he can talk of nothing else.

All this is, needless to say, very difficult for me. As his sister, I have to bear a great deal of it. I do think Dad should come and see if he can do something, or talk to Ray. Although I am sorry for these people and am related to them a little, I would not have chosen them, and feel that that relationship is purely accidental.

I shall tell you later about my plans for the future, when they will have come to a head. I am getting on all right at the office. I think another girl may be leaving, and that I am pretty sure to benefit by it, judging from something Mr. Forsdyke, one of the partners, said.

I hope you are well, Mum dear. Look after yourself. The asthma has not been so bad, except when the mornings are foggy, or when I am overtired. I do work quite hard you know! I have headaches at times, and should see about glasses, I think, but a rimless kind. Still, I must not talk about me!

You said in your last the roof is leaking. It is too bad. Almost everybody seems to have a leaking roof, or patches on the wall. . . .

She never knew how to end a letter, and was even a little embarrassed by it, but finally she wrote quickly:

Yours ever, with love,
Thelma.

And read the whole letter over, to see whether she had said too little or too much.

If she had suggested her father should come, she had not altogether bargained for his coming, for his honest look, which left her speechless. She had been thinking more of her mother as she wrote, and her mother, though not dishonest, was like herself, a woman. Her elastic code could be made to fit circumstance.

But Stan Parker came.

He could not have avoided coming. In the beginning, as a young man, when he was clearing his land, he had hewn at trees with no exact plan in his head, but got them down, even at the expense of his hands. It was in this frame of mind that Stan Parker, the father, blundered into town. He had no plan. He was bewildered by much of what he had been told. But he would, if given a chance, harness his will to the situation, and move it by strength and determination.

So he came, and waited at the door of the Bourkes' brick home, till it was opened to him; it was Thelma, he saw, was there.

"Why, hello, Dad," she said. "I knew you would come but thought you would let us know."

To this he did not make any intelligible reply, because it was a gimcrack remark, stuck on as a formal decoration. Silence had perhaps taught him more about the usages of speech than the practice of it.

"Anyway," she said, "come on in."

He was wearing a watch chain across him that she could not remember having seen. In his awkward serge he was rougher, she saw, the man her father, seated amongst the tassels and fringes of Lilian Bourke's lounge, uneasy but respectful on leath-erette. Ah, she said desperately, this is my father, whom I have not known, and began to talk about train journeys and meals.

"What's all this about Ray?" he said.

"It's more or less as I said," said Thelma. "Mr. Bourke will tell you the details when he comes in. Because I have never taken an interest in racing, and never shall. But the inquiry has not got to the bottom of it. That boy has retracted some of what he said. Whether he said it about Ray out of spite, in the beginning, I

can't tell. Anyway, they can't pin anything on Ray except a feeling that he is guilty."

Then Horrie Bourke came in, with his handkerchief tucked into his collar, and when he had sat down said, "If I had not believed in that boy I would not'uv believed in me own self."

He was a fat old man with veins in his face, brimming over with the injustice that had been done him.

"Whether it was dope or not, or too clever riding, those young fellers were mixed up in it. Tom Schmidt the jockey, him that was on Sir Murgatroyd, is no better than any of em. There was an incident at Toowoomba, I am told, though told only. So you came here today, Stan?" said Horrie Bourke.

"Yes," the father said. "I want to see Ray," Stan Parker said, his own voice growing, and growing, into the room, till it took possession.

"Yairs, yairs," said Horrie. "A course. Lily, this is Stan. My wife has been laying down with a headache. This business has hit her hard like everybody else."

"Stan!" said Lily Bourke. "Why, what do you know! I often remember how you broke that washstand at Yuruga. And now this awful thing. You have changed, Stan. It is terrible," she sighed. "Horrie will be exonerated, of course. There is no question of his honesty. But we have both suffered, and it will not make amends, in no way, Stan, for the inroads on our health. You will stay to tea, Stan."

But he got up and said, "I came here to see Ray. Where is he?"

"Oh," they said. "Yes. We don't know where he is, Stan."

"He has disappeared," said Thelma.

Stan Parker was left standing. He could ask, they said, but it was doubtful. Bernie Abrahams, the book who had employed Ray, was not too happy about the whole affair and was not saying much. Ray had lived above a shop in a certain street, which they had written on a piece of paper, in a drawer.

"There," said Lily, holding it up and reading. "It is Highclere Street, Surry Hills."

It was a dago shop, she said, and he had mentioned a couple of girls, one still a kid. Their names were Rose and Jean.

"Then I shall go and ask," said Stan Parker.

The people in the room all agreed that he should employ himself in this way.

"Ray has been warned off, Stan," said Horrie Bourke.

"Terrible for his mother," sighed Lilian. "How did she take it, Stan?"

He murmured, because he did not know, because at that moment, when his wife had been reading words, he had been living them.

Thelma came and let him out, after she had gone back for his hat, which he had forgotten on the carpet.

"I am sorry, Dad," she said, making the affair his. "I'd come with you if I thought it would do any good."

Then she kissed him, and did quite enjoy being an affectionate daughter for its passing novelty.

Stan Parker took her kiss and went. He would find Ray now. He had great faith in his own legs and staying power. He took trams when they were suggested. He took streets. Some people gave him directions with minute, antlike fidelity, as if they were receiving him with confidence into their own ant-world. Others scuttled across the asphalt, scowling at him, and shook him off.

So Stan Parker went on his way over the asphalt. Once he thought he saw Ray looking at him from a window, but was mistaken apparently. A young woman who was pinning some material to her bust pulled down the blind. In one street two cars rammed each other, crushing the occupants. He went on, sad to think that the impulse to run to their assistance had been taken from him; it would have been different on a dirt road. Now he no longer looked at people, but for the names of streets nailed to corners.

In what seemed like the last street to which he might penetrate, then or ever, a man lay spewing in the gutter. This is Highclere St., he read. He began to look for, and found, the fruitshop, of which the door was closed.

One window of that shop was blind with green paint, the other was boarded up. There was a padlock on the door, but presently a girl looked from an upper window, then a similar girl, though younger, both in coloured jumpers that they would have knitted themselves. The two girls looked down. They were sisters.

"Hello there," said the riper girl, who would have been Rose. "Who are you lookin for?"

"I am looking for Ray Parker. I am his father," said the man.

Whose leathery face was looking flat up, giving itself as a pledge to the girls.

"Ray ain't here," said the sullen Rose. "Ray's gone away."

"Where?" asked the man's breaking face.

Then the young girl who was listening also began to giggle. She began to snicker and laugh. She laughed, and hid her face, and burrowed deeper into the flesh of her sister's side. Till Rose laughed too.

"Where?" the man said with less strength.

"Up North," shrieked Rose, waving somewhere.

But Jean unfastened her teeth from her mouth, and hung down, and in a couple of awful, dry spasms said, "Don't you listen, mister. Ray went out West. Honest."

Then Stan Parker stood in the street with his shortcomings and omissions. He knew now that he would not see Ray. He no longer felt very strong. His face ached from the expression of youth and indifference it had worn for the two padlocked sisters.

Some way back, after several streets, roughly in the direction from which he had come, an old woman showed him a bag of plums she had bought.

"Look," she said. "When I bought these they were big luscious plums. Anyways, on the barrer. See these little runts of things? It ain't right," she said, moving her teeth. "A person is always had."

He agreed, because that was all he could do.

I am lost by this, he realized. He continued to walk, fumbling through the shapeless, ineffectual state in which his life had ended. Although he had acquired the habit of saying simple

prayers, and did sincerely believe in God, he was not yet sufficiently confident in himself to believe in the efficacy of the one or the extent of the other. His simplicity had not yet received that final clarity and strength which can acknowledge the immensity of belief.

So instead of praying he went into a café and ordered a plate of food.

It was a Chinese café. When the dish of chop suey was brought he sat looking at it, or more especially at the large joints in his inactive finger bones.

"You feel crook," said the young Chinese, coming and moving the cutlery into a different pattern.

"No," said Stan.

"Someone died," said the Chinese, still making a statement rather than asking a question, in a high, flash, second-generation voice.

Then he went away and began doing a sum, adding on paper over and over again, his Chinese face clear and honest, in spite of his flash, high voice.

So Stan Parker sat there and began to see he must go home. There was nothing else he could do in that city.

On the homeward journey, Stan Parker was guiltily eased by the appearance of familiar features of geography. He knew the contours of the landscape more intimately than he did the faces of men, particularly his children. From Bangalay he took the bus which runs over the hills to Durilgai. There he got down and walked across the paddocks. He would sometimes choose that more solitary approach, slowing through the yellow grass and black trees, looking about as if he were a stranger there, looking at the scrolls of fallen bark, which is a perpetual mystery.



Chapter 8

AMY PARKER accepted the absence of her son; as time passed, it was not so very different really from his presence. If she thought about him, it was as a baby, or a little boy that could not run far, or would hide and she would find him, in a game. Then she would blind him with kisses and devour the angle of his neck. He could only struggle against her love. In this way the past was made more concrete than the present.

But Ray did once send a postcard, from Albany. It was an emanation of a strange man, that she looked at respectfully through her reading glasses, as if it had been a flickering of lightning. He was in business, he said. She was proud in the end to have the card, though she did not love this man. She loved the little struggling boy, to whom her own full face was held on a summer's day. She showed the card to people, after she had dried her hands, she showed it to people who had come, and received their congratulations with decent pride, and spoke of her absent son with natural affection. But she did not love this man.

She would have liked to love. Sometimes her hands would wrestle together. Then she would force herself into some deliberate activity, or speak tenderly to her good husband, offering him things to eat and seeing to his clothes. She loved her husband. Even after the drudgery of love she could still love him. But sometimes she lay on her side and said, I have not loved him enough. It would have been simpler if she had been able to turn and point to the man their son, but she could not.

When Stan Parker had reached this age of life he did sometimes wonder what was expected of him. He was respected. He

was inseparable from the district, he had become a place name. His herd was small, but of good quality for the herd of a man in a small way, neither rich nor ambitious, but reliable, the cans would always reach the butter factory to the minute, without fail. He went to church too, singing the straight psalms and rounder hymns, in praise of that God which obviously did exist. Stan Parker had been told for so long that he believed, of course he did believe. He sang that praise doggedly, in a voice you would have expected of him, approaching the music honestly, without embellishing it. Standing in the pew, singing, the back of his neck was by this time quite wrinkled, and the sinews were too obvious in the flesh. But he was a broad and upright man.

What then was wrong? There was nothing, of course, that you could explain by methods of logic; only a leaf falling at dusk will disturb the reason without reason. Stan Parker went about the place on which he had led his life, by which he was consumed really. This is my life, he would have said if he had expressed himself other than by acts of the body. But there were seasons of stubble and dead grass, when doubts did press up. There were certain corners of his property that he could not bring himself to visit, almost as if he might have discovered something he did not wish to see. It is all right there, he said, and persuaded himself that nothing does alter that is established in the mind.

Once he had been looking at a crop of remarkably fine sorghum that was almost ready to bring in, when he remembered that same stretch of land after he had cleared it as a young man, and on it the white chips laying that his axe had carved out of the trees, and some trees and young saplings still standing and glistening there, waiting for the axe. So that he forgot his present crop and went away disturbed, and thinking.

At times he indulged in great physical exertion, excessive, in fact, for a man of his age, to atone perhaps for those weaknesses with which he was assailed. He prayed too, in prayers that he had learned, avoiding improvisations now, for he no longer trusted himself at this, and he tried to fit those stern and rather wooden prayers to his own troubled and elusive soul. He prayed

hopefully, desperately at times, always woodenly, and wondered if his wife knew.

I should tell her something of this perhaps, he said, but how to mention, and what to mention, so he could not. He realized that it was some time since they had spoken together. Except to ask for things and recount incidents, they had not really entered into each other. She was closed, he saw. He was perpetually looking at her eyelids, as she walked or sat with these drawn down, in a dream.

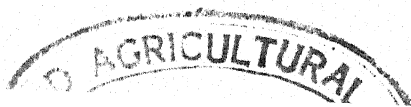
If their life and love had not been so firmly founded on habit, he would have been troubled by this too. As it was, he was not. He accepted his wife's face as further evidence of that uneasy dreamtime to which they had come at last, and through which they floated restlessly towards whatever was in store.

One evening the woman, in looking for something, had begun to turn out a cupboardful of junk, pieces of old ornaments that she had put away, knowing that almost certainly those pieces would never be joined together again, a knot of insertion turning brown, old catalogues from big stores, the teeth of children in a bottle, many valueless and transient things which some tenacity or avarice in herself had tried secretly to elevate to permanence and value. Down on her knees, turning over her possessions with some irony and helplessness, she also came across a little notebook.

As she was turning the pages, looking at them, or merely turning, the man her husband who had been watching her, waiting for some act or exposure that might illuminate the present and many other situations, sat forward and asked hopefully, "What is that that you have got, Amy?"

"Ah," she sniffed, or grunted, that evening she was in her slippers and her hair was loose, "that is a little notebook that was given me by Mrs. Erbey, I remember, the parson's wife at Yuruga. I wanted to give it to Ray, to keep a diary in. I thought it would be nice. But he wasn't taken with the idea."

Then she added, "It was a silly one perhaps. To expect boys to write down what they do. I don't think boys look back."



"Give it to me," said her husband, coming forward. "I can use it for something, to make notes or keep lists."

She was glad to give him the silly book, putting it into his hand without rising from her absorption.

The man returned to his chair on the edge of the room, and looked at the blank book, and tried to think what he would write in it. The blank pages were in themselves simple and complete. But there must be some simple words, within his reach, with which to throw further light. He would have liked to write some poem or prayer in the empty book, and did for some time consider that idea, remembering the plays of Shakespeare that he had read lying on his stomach as a boy, but any words that came to him were the stiff words of a half-forgotten literature that had no relationship with himself.

So the book remained empty. He went about, ploughing, chopping, milking, reaping, emptying buckets and filling them. All these acts were good in themselves, but none of them explained his dream life, as some word might, like lightning, out of his brain. Sometimes, though, he was appalled by his foolishness, and would look at his wife to see whether she suspected.

She did not.

"Stan," she said, "do you think it will rain yet? There is a little cloud down there in the South."

These were years of drought, and they often made such remarks, going out from under the heat of the roof to the vaster heat of the sky. To look. They would moisten the dry skin of their lips and make prognostications, sometimes hopeful, to encourage each other.

That autumn dust blew down the road from Durilgai, in hungry tongues or in eddies. In the first stages of the drought, while resistance to it was still related to self-respect, the windows of the house had been kept shut, but as the months drew out, and it became obvious that there was no real barrier to what was happening, that dust would settle, and the brittle leaves and wisps of white grass appear subtly on the carpet, the windows began to stand open. Dust had entered the drawers, and was

beginning to fill a little china shoe that the woman kept on the mantelpiece.

Is this really my house? the woman thought, pausing with her empty can, looking through the dusty oleanders at the curtains waving from the shell of the house.

Sometimes the man her husband, who had his own preoccupations, would promise himself to tell her she was letting the house go, and that she must do something about it, but he postponed this, because it is something you do postpone, out of delicacy, even pity.

Now he was away, at a sale of farm machinery that was taking place on a property at Wullunya. The woman remembered his kiss as she stood there in the arid garden. His affection, which was kind and habitual, made her feel fretful in retrospect. Then she began to whimper quietly, for no good reason, except at the touch of her own dry and drying skin, slightly gritty from the dust.

Finally she said dryly, This is ridiculous.

Later, when she had drunk some tea and felt stronger, she came out again and sat on the veranda. The afternoon was full of the clear light of autumn, but dry of course, with a hard, bright twittering of birds. The wind had turned cold, which made her shiver. It came ballooning down from out of the direction of Durilgai, making things rattle in it, twigs and loose tin.

There was a car coming down from Durilgai, a small blue car, rather new, she noticed, but without interest, perhaps from the city, but trailing the dust of these parts. She sat on her veranda, looking, because you do look. In the days of horses and her youth she would have gone down to the gate, but that was not now.

So the car continued, and drew near, as she was looking, and the man got out and came up the path, after having some trouble with the catch of the gate, carrying two heavy cases.

The man was a commercial traveller, it appeared. He asked whether he could interest her in a few lines of dress materials he was carrying. He had stockings too, and lingerie, and fancy buttons.

But the woman smiled faintly, incredulously, shaking her head. She was white as well as silent, for she had rubbed some powder on her face while she had been in the house, absently and inexpertly, and this increased her expression of remoteness, giving her, in fact, the expression of some statuary in public places, almost fatally withdrawn and impersonal.

The man dropped to his knee then. "Give us a chance," he said. "You can at least give it a lookover. That is free for nothing." Although discouraged, he could not shed the brass with which he had been armoured.

The big white woman laughed softly at the brazen man as she sat looking down, and at his hands. He began to draw out lengths of material from one case.

"This is just to show you," he said. "I got more back there in the car. French. This is a nice line," he said. "It's sort of quiet. That appeals sometimes to ladies of quiet tastes. But mind you, distinguished. This is a nice one. Something to stand out. Bright but not flash. Or this. It'll wear for years. But because it don't hit you in the eye, you won't hold that against it. Care for pink? Lots of young girls go for this one. Of course that don't mean it's not available. If it's pink you're feeling like, then pink it is. But take your time, lady. Have a look. A *comfortable* look, I always say. We've got all day."

But when he had heaped them in a turmoil at her feet, these and other soft snakes, in and out of the cases, on the veranda, the woman, who had been surrounded by such tribute of colour, and who had been fingering it in search of inspiration, finally said, "I am sorry. I have everything. There is nothing I want."

"Some people are lucky," said the man, not angrily, but almost.

He began to fold and smoothe, till he was ready to snap the catches of the cases. All was hidden. All the time she had been watching his hands, which were stained on certain fingers. He was one of the reddish men, of skin and hair. He was repulsive to her, she thought. Turning to fat. Without brilliantine he would have bristled. But she continued to watch those acts of conjuring that he was performing.

Then the man pushed back the cases, as if, surprisingly, he despised the elaborate mechanics of his slick life.

"Gee," he said, "it's dry here."

The hat pushed back, his head had begun to look naked and pitiable.

"We've had just about everything in the years we have lived here," she said, looking around. "Fire and drought. But we have never starved."

"How do you account for that?" he asked, without interest.

When he put his hands on his hips, and stood that way, thick-set and rather puffy, she might not have trusted him. Remembering her husband—in fact, she could never escape from him for long—she said, "My husband has a belief in God. At least I think he has. We have never spoken about it."

"Oh," said the man.

This woman was standing above him on the raised-up veranda, looking down. Because she was concentrating on her own thoughts, he suspected her of looking into his. Which he did not care about. So he moved the muscles in his jaws. She was a woman getting on, probably at that time of life, complicated but harmless.

"Are you religious?" he asked.

"I don't know," she said. "I don't know what I believe. Not yet."

"I never thought about it much," he said.

He spat into the bushes, but wondered at once whether he should have done so. She gave no glimpse of her feelings, though. She was a still woman. There was no indication of censure, only a sound of insects congregated round a lump of dark comb underneath the eaves.

The woman heard it too. It was a throbbing.

"You don't happen to have a glass of water," said the man at last, when his eardrums were bursting. "I'm dry as a snake."

"Yes," she said, just raising her eyes from under the weight of some deliberation that was taking place, and smiling with straight lips.

A bit dotty, he said, but a good-looking woman, or has been.

He began to follow her through the house, through which she was leading him, through an intimacy of clocks and silence.

The woman could feel the stranger in his sumptuous suit behind her. He was rather a big man in the dimness of the passage, moving in masses of squelching rubber, murmuring those commonplaces that people who talk are compelled to utter. It was exciting and disturbing for her to reveal the intimacies of her house.

Then they were in the kitchen, which did have an amplitude, of a comparatively big old kitchen. The common but living furniture was pleasant to the hands. So the man rested his knuckles as a matter of course on the surface of the big worn table, waiting for the woman to fetch him the glass of water, which she did soon, from a canvas bag.

"Ah," said the man, jerking back his head and wriggling his neck, because he was preparing to be funny. "That's the stuff to shake the navy."

It disguised the trembling of the water.

Because it was strange there. We are advancing towards something, he knew, looking at the woman's transparent eyes. Her smooth flesh trembled and receded like pale water.

He drank down the rest of the glassful, and it was very cool.

"I'd like to have a spring, like the people down the road," said Amy Parker, stepping out of the state of entrancement in which she had been shut, it seemed, for many years. "You should always look for a spring before you build a house. Tank water isn't the same."

She came forward breathlessly after that, to take the glass. Her courage had grown with words, and overcome an awkwardness of movement.

"Yes," said the man unsteadily. "There's nothing like cold spring water."

She was almost but not quite his height, he saw.

Then they were grappling with each other. Teeth were striking on teeth. Their arms were knotting.

Ahhh, cried the breath of the woman Amy Parker as she remembered a name that she could not tear up. She could have

righted herself perhaps, but only momentarily, before swirling farther to destruction.

"What's come over us?" panted the pursy man, but did not wish to be answered.

Buried in the flesh of the woman, he had returned to boyhood, from which poetry had escaped, and would again ultimately.

Presently Amy Parker took the man by the hand. Their fingers were surprising to each other's fingers. Now that their wills had withdrawn, they were trembling together in cold rooms. But after they had taken the clothes from their nakedness, fire leaped out of them, and in that blaze they would have to burn out, to whatever end.

They had gone in to that straight bed on which Amy Parker had slept out the sum of her life.

"What is it?" said the woman, opening her eyes.

"Nothing," said the thick man. "I was just thinking."

He began to think about his wife, who was thin. She had a smoker's cough. She knitted jumpers, one after the other; it was a kind of vice with her, to preserve a continuity of wool, and especially when night came.

But he broke off there. He had remembered something. He bent forward, examining the woman's skin. "They call me Leo," he said.

"Leo," she said dully.

She neither accepted nor rejected. In that drowsiness even her own name was not stuck on.

"Well," he said, "I've got to be on my way."

It was not the moment for two people who had looked so intimately into each other to kiss. So they touched each other somehow, and she heard him going too quickly through the house, and did not think about him much more for that moment, as if he had ceased to be of importance to her. She lay there smiling and dreaming. If she was destroyed, she had not yet woken to her ghost.

When Stan Parker got home he saw that his wife had probably had a headache. Sometimes after headaches, or some secret

activity of thought, the flesh of her face had a grey tinge, which it had now. It looked flatter. Immediately he turned his eyes away from this, and began to tell her about the sale at Wullunya and people he had seen, about illnesses, and deaths, and marriages. She bent her head and received all this information with gratitude, even humility.

She wanted to do something for him.

"Here's a nice piece, Stan," she said, "with the fat on that you like."

"You are not eating," he said.

"No," she said, turning down her mouth, as if he had mentioned something nauseating to her. "I have no appetite."

And began to go about.

"It has blown all right," he said. "It will dry the last drop."

So that she saw the yellow grass lying down, in that brassy light of afternoon, in which travellers appear out of a distance.

"There was a man here this afternoon," she said, in a louder voice than was hers. "With things to sell."

"What sort of things?"

"Dress materials, and oh, fancy things."

"What did you buy?" he asked.

"What should I buy?"

"I don't know," he said. "Why, some *frill*!"

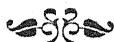
He laughed for that word which he had not pulled out of his mouth till then.

"At my time of life!" She laughed.

Holding up her throat for the laughter to escape with passion, it seemed.

He was content, though. He took yesterday's paper, more as an occupation than to cast fresh light on that little which he already knew. Amy moved about the kitchen. Her hair was flat and quiet, that she had smoothed down. In the stove she put wood, for a moment allowing the fire to shoot out. But she quickly damped it down.

"The wood is nearly done, Stan," she said.



Chapter 9

SOME TIME after the wedding, not at once, but after they had settled into the house, the Forsdykes went down to see her parents.

"You will be bored, of course, but it is time you faced up to it," Thelma said, making her husband responsible for any delay there had been.

The husband cleared his throat but otherwise did not contradict. He drove. He selected a gap between two cars and drove through with some dash, though not ordinarily possessing it. He was a prudent man.

"You are in a draught," said Mr. Forsdyke at last because, as a husband recently created, it was time that he thought of some tenderly considerate but practical thing. He reached across her, absently, and wound up the glass of her window.

Then she smiled, and breathed languidly, and touched the window with her glove. She was ever so content, in love, she would have said, if she did not suspect that such an admission would have been contrary to that good taste she had begun to learn about. She thought in amazement of her house, of which the paint shone between laurels in the afternoon, or she stood in the darkness, secretly, to look, and the house was a fixed framework of light, round which tossed an unruly suggestion of trees that other people had planted.

The parents had been to the house on one occasion since the wedding. If they had not been to the wedding, it was because, obviously, it might have been embarrassing. But on an afternoon visit, alone, they were appreciative and hushed. They brought eggs and a few enormous oranges. Witnessing the decency of her

parents, the daughter was for a moment sad that she had had to abandon them, but quickly put her hands in the pockets of her cardigan, and from behind its texture recovered a sense of reality.

"They are sweet things, of course," she said now, inside her fur collar.

"What?" asked Mr. Forsdyke, whose other name was Dudley.

"My mother and father," said Thelma Forsdyke.

The two people drove on. They looked very delicate, also rather silly, from outside the car. Rain was beating at the windows out of a large grey sky.

Thelma Forsdyke looked about her at the countryside, which had become uninteresting, insignificant, since she had achieved position. It was existing vaguely in spite of her, she saw, but it was not evident to what purpose. Thelma Forsdyke wished they had not come. She looked at her little diamond watch, not so much to read the time as to assure herself by significant movements that events did follow a sequence.

"This is their road now," she said, deliberately dissociating herself from the geography of that place.

The husband's features, through concentrating on the situation that must be faced, had grown thin.

"This must be their car now, Stan," said the mother, looking out from behind the curtains she had washed that Monday.

And the father, who was determined to look cheerful and creditable, foresaw himself, without great dismay, lost in the silences of odd corners with the solicitor his son-in-law. In the room of their house in which they waited, and which no longer seemed theirs since the approach of strangers stressed its ordinariness, he moved about, and listened to his boots squeak.

"Have you cleaned your boots?" Amy Parker asked.

"I have," he said, putting out his feet for her to see.

"Stan," she said, dusting him with her hand, "do you like this man, the solicitor?"

"I have nothing against him," said the father-in-law.

Amy Parker had looked out again on hearing the mud fly up. The car was there.

"Oh, Stan," she said, "we had better go out, I suppose. Hadn't we?"

Because she was shivering, it was such a raw day, she had pressed against him, to restore warmth, and incidentally familiarity, by touch. Then they were going out together, and what had to be, was. All four people met beside the old rosebush, which was flinging little drops of water into their faces, and pricking their flesh, and tearing at their awkward clothes. There was a kissing and a shaking of hands. All four people were looking at one another, hoping for something they could recognize.

"Well, dear, you did not have a very nice drive," said Amy Parker to her daughter. "And Dudley. Nothing is at its best, of course, on a day like this."

"I told him not to expect too much," said Thelma, who realized that in spite of resolutions her powers of endurance were not great.

She arranged her good, negative clothes, and received her father's kiss. This was rougher than she had remembered. She looked at his boots. She began to smile wonderingly at all she saw, as if this might prove to be some new experience, both amusing and touching, and particularly she looked at her father, he was a dear, he had given her this hope. Men are less positive to most women, and so more acceptable.

"Dudley knows absolutely nothing about life in the country. But he is willing to learn," said Thelma, poised halfway between the natural irony of the situation and that kindness of which her father had reminded her.

"Thelma has a weakness for making the confessions of other people," laughed the solicitor.

"He can see all right, whatever there is to see, but there isn't much to show," said Stan Parker without any effort.

The mother and daughter were surprised, and even a bit annoyed, that he should speak with apparent ease to the dry man

his son-in-law. They suspected something. Still more, as he was making first moves to lead the solicitor away among the wet trees.

"But it is raining, Stan," said Amy Parker to regain control. "I thought we should have a cup of tea first."

Those thick, white, bottomless cups, remembered Thelma.

"It may clear up later," suggested the mother, though she did not much care, provided the day preserved more or less the shape she had decided on.

"It has cleared. Look," smiled Stan, holding up his hand in a goblet.

Very few drops fell. A charitable sky of cold blue prevailed. So that he laughed at his own powers. It would have mattered once, but did not now. Hence this ease which had overtaken him on his own doorstep. The difficulties of his youth lay thick behind him, even if he could not see a way through the comparatively open future.

"It couldn't have been better laid on," he said, beginning to lead his relations.

"Miraculous," laughed the solicitor, looking at the sky, at the path, here and there between bushes, to look at something.

Stan Parker was sorry for the lost man, and thought that he might like him, if given the chance, although it was improbable that this opportunity would occur.

"But so muddy," grumbled the mother, lowering her head and frowning at branches that she knew well.

They went down deviously to the cow yards. There were rounds of dung lying in their path. They trailed across the brick floor at the empty bails, and along the bank of the creek, where sticks cracked beneath the feet and cows looked at them from above blue tongues, and along the ploughed land from which corn would spring. The mother and daughter were talking about a tablecloth, a wedding present, that had got stained at a laundry, with iron mould, and the mother knew how to take it off.

"It is all very interesting," said the solicitor, touching a furrow with his toe. "The soil. It is a grand life. And productive."

Because it was his life, Stan Parker had never thought of it as this. It had taken possession of him. But nothing had ever taken possession of Dudley Forsdyke, except perhaps his wife.

The front room had been prepared for the rites of tea with a few little bunches of early roses, some of which were opening into frail flowers, but others had been picked too tight in bud and would never break, they looked sick. The room had the dark smell of a room that has not been lived in. All the furniture was dark and awful to Thelma Forsdyke, who moved amongst it thoughtfully. She was surprised that she had been able to escape from anything so positive. Suspicions of what she had been lurked amongst mahogany. So that she was forced to turn quickly to present matters. At a clean sweep, it appeared, she took the gloves off her long hands, on which the rings glittered without apology.

Amy Parker, whose breath preceded everything she did, brought a big teapot ornamented with lustre, and a yellow cake, and some large scones on a glass stand.

She said, "Have you seen the Bourkes, Thel?"

At times she did deal blows that were not intended for a particular recipient, for those, rather, on whom they happened to land. At these times she would have said, I did not mean anything by it, it was no more than something to say.

"No," replied Thelma Forsdyke, looking gravely at her cup. "I have not seen them."

"The Bourkes?" asked her husband.

"Some relations," said Thelma, biting off a very small piece of scone. "I lived with them at one time. They were very kind."

Now from the pallor of her own tasteful room, to which the Bourkes would not come, she could afford to be charitable. She had reached that height from which charity is possible.

"Poor old Horrie Bourke is sick," said Stan Parker.

"He could die," said his wife, whom tea in strong doses made melancholy.

Then we are not to escape the Bourkes, decided Thelma Forsdyke. She looked appropriately sad. She did genuinely become

sad in the dark room, though it was for herself, that she was burying.

"Do you play cards, Dudley?" asked Amy Parker.

"No," he said in a crumbly sort of voice, his mouth was full.

"I have never played cards."

"We don't here," said Amy Parker. "Some people like a hand in the evening, though."

I must remember to ask her about herself, said Thelma, before we go, but remember, it is enough to ask, people do not or are not able to tell what is flickering in them. Asking is a kindness, though.

Then the solicitor drew himself up inside his suit of good English material and said, "And how is the other one, Mrs. Parker, your boy, the one I have never met?"

This is what we have been waiting for, Thelma Forsdyke knew.

The father sat forward now, rubbing tobacco between his hands, till the scent of tobacco filled the room, and his hands were overflowing with it.

"Oh, Ray," said the mother.

She cut several pieces of cake, though everyone had finished. She left them there.

"Ray is well," she said, but cautiously. "He will be coming one of these days."

Then she looked out of the window, past the canes and leaves, into that greenish light and stillness.

"Ray was a lovely boy," she said. "You will see. Brown skin, red lips. Strong. But he did not seem to think we understood. He was dodging off down the gully. I could not follow him. Once there were some seabirds come over, and he shot one and buried it. He thought I did not know, but I could smell it on his hands."

Then Thelma Forsdyke began to feel her chest tighten with disgust. She began to cough, and no means with her of stopping it.

The solicitor saw his hat on a chair where he had put it on coming in. He would be glad to return to where all his possessions were arranged.

"You should not bring up all these old things, Mother," said Stan Parker, who had rolled a cigarette of a most uneasy shape.

"Why?" she said. "They are not old."

They were not. She was looking at him.

In the meantime Thel was going, or Mrs. Forsdyke, with her husband.

Kisses had begun. Regrets hung on the air, and reluctant drops on rosebushes.

"Button up your collar, dear," said the mother.

"It has not got a button," laughed Thelma. "That would be hideous."

She had overcome her coughing, with assistance of the brutal air, or sight of her own car.

She was ready. Then, on looking back, she did remember that she had forgotten to ask her mother to tell about herself, what sort of person she was, and what was happening to her. Well, it could not be helped.

Then they were ready, and drove off. She had forgotten to kiss her father, because you took Dad for granted, he would still be standing there, his hard and surprising trunk, rooted.

Mr. Forsdyke sighed and drove.

"Those Bourkes," he said, "I had never heard of them."

"She is a purple woman," Thelma laughed. "Almost always dressed in blue. But blue."

And as if that were not brutal enough she added, "He is a horse trainer."

They drove on.

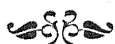
"There is no reason," said Dudley Forsdyke, "why you should not be nice to them."

The germ of good deeds emplanting in others begets a sense of nobility.

"And your brother," he said, "Ray, whom I have not met. Why have I never met Ray?"

"There is no reason," it was now Thelma Forsdyke's turn to say. "He has been away. That's all. He'll turn up, I expect."

Would he? twitched Dudley Forsdyke, wondering what kind of man his brother-in-law really was.



Chapter 10

THE GARDEN at Parkers' had almost taken possession of the house. It was a haphazard sort of garden. Mrs. Parker would plant a shrub with passion, something she had seen and desired intensely, would plant it, and forget about it. Then suddenly it had grown and was sawing at its neighbours. All flowers, all leaves, were interlocked in that garden. The shrubs were blooming in each other. Sometimes Mrs. Parker would come out from the house, and push the branches aside impatiently, and look out. Her brown skin had wrinkled at the eyes from days beneath the sun. Her skin was rough. Branches of trees, twigs of shrubs, would catch at her hair and draw it out. It got in a mess sometimes, but what can you do? and she was all the time snatching at it, putting it back, with her brown hand, with its dull ring. Her hand was rather hard but pleasing. You would look at it.

And at her, as she peered through the branches of the oleanders, that were always dusty, every summer, or as she parted the tufts of the tea tree, looking for the grub that sews them up. Sometimes Mrs. Parker would look at the people passing on the road, but she would not speak to them now, not so much. She would go back into her house, climbing the steps with precision, some old cardigan most likely caught around her broad figure, she had certainly broadened at the hips. Then she would go inside her house, rather a secret woman, into the brown house, inseparable from the garden, from the landscape in which it was.

That house had never had a name. At first it had not needed one. It had become known as Parkers' and had stayed that way. There was no one at Durilgai, no one in the surrounding districts.

who could remember when Parkers' had not stood. Everybody took it for granted and no longer looked at it. Many people thought it was ugly. It was old and brown anyway, and less planned than purposeful.

Mr. Parker kept it in pretty good order, though. He kept the gutters cleared and the woodwork painted, and replaced any boards that the white ant was getting at. He was a conscientious sort of man. Slow. He was a big man, coming up the slope from his cows, or ploughing a furrow for corn. When he remembered, he was wearing glasses now, the little metal-rimmed kind, on account of some headaches he had been having. The glasses were a damn nuisance and got broke; he had mended them in one place with waxed string. But they began to suit his face. He came up the slope with buckets, and would jerk his head at people, even at strangers, to pass the time of day. People liked him. His skin was honest.

On placid days Amy Parker sat on the front veranda, to watch from behind vines, and the canes of an old rose, that must go, it was too possessive and too old. Here she sat, though, in the meantime, watching for something to happen, though mostly it did not.

When Thelma Forsdyke came down, which she did more frequently than would have been expected, she was amazed to find her mother sitting there, an active woman too.

"Are you all right, Mother?" she would ask.

Passive herself, she resented passivity in other people. Since she had discovered literature she would disguise her indolence by holding a book. Though she did read too, a lot. But to sit unashamedly was suspect or a sign of illness. She was terrified that her mother might develop a cancer in her old age and need intimate attentions. For which the daughter would pay, of course, she was rich. But to come down to the furtive, insinuating smells of illness in a modest room. So Thelma Forsdyke searched her mother's face for signs of such withering.

"I am not sick," said Amy Parker. "I have sat down for a bit because I like it."

She smiled incredulously at her daughter, at the cloth of her coat, and a string of pearls. They touched cheeks. It was mildly pleasing to the mother. She no longer experienced any desire to possess her daughter, because she had failed to do so. But she did take part in the legend of Thelma Forsdyke. It was an amiable game that they played, of mother and daughter.

Sometimes Thelma Forsdyke walked round her drawing room and, remembering the abyss of her origin, closed the windows tight. That is something which it is not possible to escape. It is with you always. So that her face was not convincing to her, even at its best.

Once the maid came in, an elderly woman with soft ways, who had been trained by somebody else.

"There is a gentleman to see you, madam. He says it is on urgent private business. He would not give a name," said the elderly maid in a discreet cap.

How safe, how established, even the elderly maids are.

The gentleman was Ray Parker, Mrs. Forsdyke's brother.

"I bet you were surprised, Thel," laughed Ray, coming into the drawing room and pitching his hat that he had brought with him, an aggressive new brown hat, pitching it from him, somewhere. "I like to give people surprises," he laughed. "It takes them out of their rut. You're in a pretty good rut, though," he said, looking round.

"We chose this house for the view," she said, coming forward to receive a guest. "It has water on three sides. You can see right up the harbour, and on this side, out to the Heads."

Then she looked at her brother, to discover what he might want.

The man who had sat down heavily on her colourless brocade, he was by this time a heavy man, meant to play her for a bit. He said, "I came to take a dekker at you, Thel. Here we are, related. But anyone would think we didn't exist, anyone who didn't know about the other."

She laughed.

"What good would it do these hypothetical people to know that we do exist?"

He was a sensual man, she saw, and sensuality made her nervous.

"Anyway," she said, giving a concise smile and sitting down, "you are here."

"That is more like it," he said in his thick, easy voice. "And this solicitor bloke that I never even met, when does he come in?"

"That depends," she said. "Professional men don't run by clockwork."

"I can wait, though," said Ray Parker. "I have always wanted to meet him."

"I can think of no two things you would have in common," laughed Thelma Forsdyke.

"You never can tell," said Ray Parker. "I have got to know coves in railway carriages, and on the backs of trucks at night. You would be surprised. Oh, you need not get worried, Thel. I'm going straight enough now. That is, I am in business. I am selling cars. I have stood drinks to some of the best people. But it all costs. And I am out of dough. What I have come here for, to be honest, you will appreciate the word, is to touch you for twenty quid. I am being married on Tuesday to a girl called Elsie Tarbutt."

"Is she conscious of what she is doing?" asked Mrs. Forsdyke, going to a little bureau for which she had paid a lot of money under the impression that the adorable furniture was genuine antique.

"Yes," said Ray Parker. "She is going to reform me. She is a Methodist."

"Ah," said the sister.

She wrote off a cheque, putting that graceful signature which it was no longer necessary to practise.

"I wonder whether I would be interested to see her," she said, and smiled, as she paid her brother off.

Again she thought, Ray has failed to accomplish the grand manner. It is a miserable sum.

"To meet Elsie?" he said, looking to see what figure she had written. "No. It would not be the right thing. One crook in the family is enough."

So they stood there hating.

"I'll be going now," said Ray Parker, picking up his flash hat. "It'll ease the situation."

Soon after that Mrs. Forsdyke felt the necessity for visiting her mother again. So she drove down, and soon they were speaking together on the veranda, which was their habitual meeting place.

"I am sorry you were not at the wedding," said the mother, beginning to enjoy a good talk, with its web of relationships, in which even flaws would be of interest.

"I was not asked," said the daughter, and wondered whether she was slightly hurt.

"I would have thought that for a wedding all differences are made up," said the old woman. "Still, everyone has their own ideas. Ray has turned over a new leaf."

The mother had decided this. She did not yet know herself well enough to doubt. Or she lowered her eyelids on doubt, over her own life, so that she had a slatted look. As she peered out she was determined to see all hopeful things.

"It was a nice wedding," she said. "Mr. Tarbutt is a grocer, at Leichardt. There were beautiful presents. Someone gave a whole canteen of silver. Ray was in his element, of course. People like him. He sang too. Did you know that Ray could sing? He is prosperous now, it seems. There was a whole big ham laid open in slices for people to help themselves."

"And what about Elsie?" Thelma asked.

"Elsie is not pretty," said Mrs. Parker. "But she is what Ray wants. She will make an excellent wife."

"She is a Methodist," said Thelma.

"Did you know then?"

"And you do not like her."

THE TREE OF MAN

"That you do not know, because it is not true," said Amy Parker, moving in her chair. "Elsie is an excellent girl."

So Amy Parker sat at her son's wedding and watched Elsie. Under the orange blossoms, at the temples, in her thick, creamy skin, the pores were rather large. Elsie had a flat face, but kind. She was expecting something as she came up to speak. She laughed at jokes, because it was the thing. Then closed up, because it was finished. She had a closed face waiting to be opened. All the time her creamy, porous skin was craving for affection. And Amy Parker realized that Elsie was unprotected. She looked and saw the girl had nothing to hide.

Elsie Parker was quickly pregnant, of course, and had a delicate boy, that they called after the father. After the child was born, after she had begun to go about again, she frequently took her child to Durilgai, to his grandparents.

She walked deliberately down that road, down which the buses did not run, holding her baby in a scalloped shawl that she kept very clean. Or later, when he had reached the staggering stage, she would herself stagger, with the lolling child astride her hip, and pause, brushing back the hair from his clear eyes, to look at him, while she got her breath. And later still she would meander, looking sightlessly at the paddocks, while the child who was by then a little boy ran at her side, or wandered, or stopped, and came clattering back to her, to ask the names of insects and plants.

"These are not things that I know. Perhaps Granpa will," she would say, speaking to him and not, and at the same time wondering what it was she did know.

But the boy was not cheated by her ignorance. He was not intensely interested in answers, the things themselves were enough. So he ran on, holding the leaf by its twig, or feather by its quill, and whereas his mother thought mostly of arriving, discovery kept him in a state of endless being.

When they got there the grandmother almost always had just taken a batch of currant cakes from the oven, and would come

out with the smell of cake about her, and say, "You got here then."

The mother would begin to tell some details of their journey, precise but colourless, which nobody listened to, but which she threw in because she felt that something was expected of her. And the grandmother was smiling and looking out at the paddocks. And the boy was smiling and panting for breath as he pulled up his socks. On no account would the grandmother have addressed the boy on arrival, or looked directly at him, and she would certainly not have kissed him, because both were reserving themselves for subtler intimacies.

Amy Parker had not attempted to possess this remote child, with the consequence that he had come closer than her own. She was placid with him. She was an old woman, of course. It was easier. Even in her moments of irony, or foreboding that this little boy would eventually do or say some cruel thing, or invest himself with some mystery that would not be for her to solve, her well-being was not disturbed.

Sometimes, taking the boy into the house, she would show him things. There is a mysticism of objects, of which some people are initiates, as this old woman and boy.

"Come here," she said, "and I will show you something."

She did not call him by his name, which was his father's. Only strangers called him that.

She took him into the pantry, which opened off the kitchen. At one end was a window which let the summer in. Here the grandmother showed her son, he was her son really, showed the jars, and the tub in which she pickled meat, and a glass contraption with which to catch flies. There were many jars. Kumquats or jewels glittered there. He held his eyes against the glass, staring into the kumquats till he had turned dizzy.

"They are whole," he said, for himself.

"Yes," sighed the old woman, who had grown sick of showing things and would have liked to go and sit down "You prick them with a darning needle. That lets the sweetness in. Otherwise they would stay bitter. Your mouth would shrivel up. Will you try one?"

"No," he said. "Thank you."

He looked at other things.

Would he be peculiar in any way? she asked. Boys should eat kumquats, the syrup running from the corners of their mouths. Ray the father's lips were red. They shone with eating, sweets, and fat things, he had liked the fat on bacon. But this was a thin, pale boy.

"Can I see inside that tin up there?" he asked.

It was a tin with a pattern on it of little flowers. A present from a grocer, a Christmas box perhaps, she had forgotten. She took it down. In it were some seeds, that could have been the seeds of poppies, that she crunched with her teeth, a few of them, to try, and spat out.

"That is some old rubbish," she said, "that I have forgotten all about."

There were other things that she had forgotten, jars of rancid stuff that the boy had fossicked amongst, alone on other occasions, and said nothing about. He loved his grandmother, beyond question, if quietly.

"Can I keep this tin?" he asked.

"If you like," she said, or yawned, because she was sleepy, and often closed her eyes at that hour, not exactly sleeping, because she was not yet really old, she would rest in a chair though, with her eyes closed. "What will you do with a tin like that?" she asked.

"I shall keep my pencils in it. I have fifteen pencils, not including the coloured ones."

"What will you do with so many pencils?" she asked, who had a stump in a drawer, and would use that when necessary.

"Write things," he said.

"What sort of things?" she asked.

But he was picking at the woodwork.

"I will give you a book to write in," she said. "I got it for your father, who did not use it. Then Stan took it, why, I never knew. Oh, to make some lists, he said. Then I found it in a drawer. It was still not written in."

He thanked her. But he was tired of talking.

She too was tired. So they went from the larder with its jars of still fruit, the grandmother and the boy walking through the house. At that age it was still a large house in the child's eyes. Soon the grandmother would sleep, in a chair that fitted itself to her body for that purpose, and he would crawl through the undergrowth, into rooms of vaster importance, and beyond the palpitating green of roof, and rafters that the sap foamed along, was the dome that he could split into a mosaic of tingling blue merely by staring at it.

So Amy Parker sat in the plaited cane chair, and thought, or snoozed. In time, she supposed, I shall not understand him. Some tall man coming up the path would treat her as a joke. So she mumbled and wetted her lips.

"What is it, Mother?" asked the daughter-in-law, who had been drying some glasses and putting them away, and relining a shelf of which the paper had got dirty, and doing a few other unnoticeable jobs.

"The boy has gone off somewhere," said Amy Parker. "Is he all right?"

"He is all right, I expect," said Elsie. "He is a sensible boy really."

The young woman would have liked to add to the physical comfort of her mother-in-law, speculating that in this way they might meet on common ground. She looked at the old woman, to see whether she could arrange her in some way, but realized that this would not be possible.

Because Amy Parker did not like Elsie.

She sat and watched Elsie doing crochet work. She stared at her thick, creamy skin. Statement, not narration, was Elsie's forte, though now, it seemed, there was something that she had to tell.

"I used to know a girl who was always doing crochet work. She would drop stitches and begin to count, but she would forget her count. So she never got anywhere. But she was always starting, all sorts of things, a quilt once, and babies' bonnets, she was making things for her nieces. Oh, once I think she did finish a

piece of work. It was a doily, and then her mother helped her. Her name was Ethel Bonnington."

It was boring.

Ah dear, said Amy Parker, I cannot follow this.

But Elsie persisted, on visits of whole days, or week-ends, or she would come for long weeks. With the boy, of course. She would work too. She would wring out sheets. Once she teased a kapok mattress, it transpired she knew how. And she loved her mother-in-law, she had begun and would not end.

Then Amy Parker rose up, she was compelled, to see whether she could leave her mark on the board of Elsie's face.

They were on the veranda, as many times before. Elsie was doing crochet work.

"That girl Ethel, that you were telling me of," Amy Parker said, "was she a relative?"

"Oh, Ethel," Elsie laughed and blushed. "No."

"She seems to have been a stupid sort of girl."

"Poor Ethel," said Elsie, who had nothing against her. "She was clever at school. She passed exams and things. She had a head for facts. But life, of course, is not facts. So Ethel got confused. She took to crochet work."

"Fancy, crochet. If it had been knitting."

"I like crochet. It is soothing," Elsie blushed.

"It is a jiggery sort of work," Amy Parker said.

Elsie breathed.

"I don't know that I particularly want to be soothed," said Amy Parker. "Where is Ray now, Elsie?"

"He has his job," Elsie said.

"Has Ray left you?" asked Amy Parker.

"I don't know," said Elsie, for whom the pattern had become complicated, of little double roses, in shiny beige silk, that she had chosen. "He has been back."

Then Amy Parker began to pity Elsie. Her skin was terribly pitiable with that way of flushing upward from the neck. In pity, the older woman's own failure began to seem less a failure, almost a success. She began to like Elsie.

"You will not hang on to Ray," said Amy Parker.

"But I did not intend to *hang on* to Ray," Elsie said. "Nor on to anyone."

The sky which had formed above the two women in clots of cloud and veins of brass hung lower. To the old woman it was unpleasant, filled with personal threats. But the young one was unmoved, or too impersonally moved to fear.

Looking at, or into, Elsie, if only for the second of lightning, Amy Parker knew she had begun to love her. God save us, she said, Elsie is perhaps strong.

Then the storm was breaking on the two women. Their chairs were grating. They laughed, and recovered themselves, and chased the ball of silk that threatened to escape them.

Till suddenly the grandmother remembered and cried, "Where is the boy? Not out in this!"

But the mother was still protected by her mood.

"He will have got in somewhere," she said, soothing.

"And Stan."

The old woman began to remember her husband, whom she had forgotten. She forgot him now for whole days.

The two women walked mechanically through the shaking house, to find whatever was intended for them to find.

"We just made it," said Stan Parker, who was standing at the screen door at the back, the gauze was still quivering, as he wiped the water from his leather face.

The boy had pressed his on the window till his nose was white, and he looked out through water.

"Look," he called excitedly, turning back into the room. "Life under water would look like this. To a fish."

But no one would share his moment of belief, perhaps had not even heard his words. So revelations are never conveyed with brilliance as revealed. The boy knew, however.

"I am not wet," he protested, throwing off his grandmother, who began to feel her husband with less anxiety, but to establish some authority.

"You are both soaked," she said. "To my hands, anyway."

And was angry. It was her right.

"It is one of those showers," said Stan Parker. "A little bit of wet never did no one any harm."

And began to fray out tobacco, with which to roll a cigarette.

"Who will pay the price?" the angry woman asked.

She was impotent, but above all she resented his leatheriness.

"You will," laughed Stan Parker, licking the thin paper.

The boy, who was content now, in the dry, tobacco-scented room, came and stood beside his grandfather. He liked to watch minute operations. He liked the smell of the little rubber bag in which the old man carried tobacco.

"Let me light it?" he asked when the thin and tinkling thing was rolled.

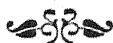
"It is all very well," said Amy Parker, whose eyes were feverish with what she had suffered, with what she still had to suffer for Stan.

"Go on, Granpa," said Elsie, to whom none of this was fatal, "go and take your clothes off."

Presently the old man went to change.

Other clothes changed Stan Parker less than they do most people. Different mysteries emanated from his wife Amy with different clothes. But the husband was more honest, which also made him irritating. At this age, anyway, he could see an object as it was, and interpret a gesture as it was meant. His life was no less wonderful for this baldness. He had developed a passion for carpentry in recent years, and the simplicity and rightness of his work was greatly satisfying.

At this time of his life it was his grandson who filled his thoughts, though he would never have admitted it. Their relationship was a marvellous one, almost entirely confined to the workshop. Outside the workshop they did not exist for each other, it appeared, anyway they scarcely spoke. But in the workshop each conversation that they had was in the nature of a confession.



Chapter II

DURING the last few years a number of other homes had been built down the road at Durilgai in which Parkers had always lived. There were the original few weatherboard homes, of which the landscape had taken possession, and which had been squeezed back from the road, it seemed, by other developments. The wooden homes stood, each in its smother of trees, like oases in a desert of progress. They were in process of being forgotten, of falling down, and would eventually be swept up with the bones of those who had lingered in them, and who were of no importance anyway, either no-hopers or old. If the souls of these old cottages disturbed, any uneasiness can almost be excluded from the brick villas simply by closing windows and doors and turning on the radio. The brick homes were in possession all right. Deep purple, clinker blue, ox blood, and public lavatory.

All of this which was going on all round them affected and did not affect Parkers. It did not affect them in that they had reached an age where all that was happening visibly was hardly credible. Where it did affect these old people more credibly was that their property had been subdivided and most of it sold up.

This began to happen not long after. At Parkers implacable cows stood in the mellow evenings, or in the mornings, stood rubbing their necks against the grey posts. The man, who continued to go down as usual, but tauter than before, sometimes with a tingling in his skin that made him smile unexpectedly, and his wife, who was troubled by her leg, besides having grown rather big behind, and old, and resentful, clung to the cows as a motive of existence, and dared not substitute another. Like many

old people who have been wound up, they could not regulate themselves, they were afraid of breaking down.

Then Mrs. Forsdyke, the daughter, drove down in her car.

The father was waiting for his daughter to come. His eyelids and his wrists had gone a bit scaly, but his teeth were still strong and good. He smiled at her.

"What is it all about then, Thel?"

Because Mrs. Forsdyke had suggested in a note that there was something she *wished* to talk about. She favoured that verb, which was discreet but firm.

"Oh," she laughed, looking at him, enjoying this distant relationship with a simple old man, at the same time, secretly, her father, "it is a little plan. Which I hope will appeal to you. Not because it is mine, or that I want to force anything, but it is so reasonable. Dudley agrees."

Mrs. Forsdyke was one of those women who enlist their husbands when they expect to meet resistance.

"You are looking a little tired, dear," she said, approaching her father. She kissed him too.

"I am not more tired than I ever was," said the old man.

"No, Dad," said the daughter, picking snails off a bush and crushing them with her shoe, "if you are not tired, then you are not."

She winced for the snails, but did glance back in curiosity.

"You love those cows too much ever to be tired," Mrs. Forsdyke said.

"There is no question of loving the cows," said the old man. "The cows are all right. But I am not married to them, as they say."

"I had always thought," said his daughter, "that a man was indissolubly married to his cows."

The old man made a noise.

"But if he is not," said Thelma Forsdyke, "then it is easy."

"How, easy?"

"To send them off in one of those things. What is it? A float. And stay in bed later the next morning, to see whether you like

it, and then when you do, stay in bed late the following morning. Until you are used to doing nothing. Oh, when I say *nothing*, I mean you can have a hobby. There is this carpentry you have taken up. It must be great fun. Fresh wood does smell so pleasant. And you have never been anywhere. Well, you can go. With poor Mother. You can come to us sometimes on a Sunday. Normally we are very quiet. On Sundays everybody is at home. With their families. Wouldn't you like that?"

Stan Parker did not say whether he would like. He would, certainly, have liked to sit a long time and watch the passage of a snail which had survived the foot. He would sit, and in his own time retrace his own path, thin and silver, through the mists. But he did not speak.

Old people are easily hurt, considered Thelma Forsdyke with impatience.

In fact, he was not. He would think, he was already thinking, about what his daughter had said. He could give up, if not for those reasons, to those ends. Thelma is silly, he said, I am not that imbecile, but she has got something. He could give up as she suggested, more even, land even, even his life, simply because it was not his to keep. It had become blindingly obvious.

He was looking pale, for him.

"You will see," said Thelma, patting his hand, "how much better you will feel for the rest."

Because he did not resist, then or later, on that passive morning, she went away filled with pity and complacency, pity because the poor old fellow was growing senile, and complacency as the mentor of simple people's lives. She drove off joyfully, mistaking instrumentality for power.

After she had gone Stan Parker walked about his property, slowly, and with all the appearance of aimlessness, which is the impression that spiritual activity frequently gives, while all the time this communion of soul and scene was taking place, the landscape moving in on him with increased passion and intensity, trees surrounding him, clouds flocking above him with tenderness such as he had never experienced. He could have touched the

clouds. Now, when he should have been detached, he was nervous, whipping his trouser leg with a little stick. For this scene which was his, and which was not, was too poignant. So he stooped to watch some ants dragging a butterfly's wing through a desert of stones. A convinced activity of tingling ants. Then suddenly he twitched the wing away. He tossed it into the sunlight, where it fluttered and shimmered, rightly restored to air, but while it was still floating and falling he went away, shaken by the ruthlessness of divine logic.

And they began soon after this to sell off Parkers' property by lots. It was easily accomplished, because it was desirable land, in a district that was being opened up. The old man did not take a direct hand in the business transactions, because his son-in-law was there, and, more actively, his daughter. He let other people work the necessary but insignificant machinery of this phase. It pleased those concerned, his respect and docility emphasizing their superior gifts. The poor old man, they smiled, has no business sense. So they went out of their way to see that he was not taken down by anyone, not even by themselves.

When the land was sold Parkers did have three or four acres left. They had the gully at the back and one paddock at the side. They had a house cow with asymmetrical horns, and Mr. Parker grew a few cabbages in winter, between the rows of which his wife strolled, in an old cardigan, on warm days, and stooped to pull a blade of grass that had come up out of place.

One day as Amy Parker was walking between the cabbages, as was her custom now, she was trying to remember something. Some restlessness had begun to possess her, of association. Then it was her youth that began to come back in the world of cabbages. She heard the dray come up with the mound of blue cabbages, and the snap of straps in the frost, as putting her shoulders through the window she spoke to her husband. She was remembering all mornings. And the little ears of cabbage seedlings that he stuck into the earth, into the holes that he had made with a shovel handle. She remembered the arms of her husband as they worked in the sunlight, the little hairs on the forearms.

Two visits were paid to Mrs. Parker about this time. One was upsetting and one exhilarating, but she would examine both incidents for years, for some aspect she had forgotten. Then she would see them in a brilliant light, the features distinct and illuminated, the hard or funny words printed plainly, as if on grey cardboard, she did actually see them as she sat amongst her still plants.

The first of those visitors was a man, who came along the path in a brown hat with the bloom still on it. His head was down, so that she did not see yet, but heard the sounds of a man, of money, and leather, and a cleared throat. She heard words too in the man's voice, for he came talking with a little boy, who was all radiance, a fat, rosy little boy, jumping, and running backwards, and pulling buds off as he passed.

The still woman continued to sit amongst her plants, waiting to see what would happen, and whether she would know what to do. Her heart was knocking already for the man. For whoever it was. Strangers at close quarters would assume monstrous proportions. So that she waited fearfully for him to raise his head.

He did, shaking the fuchsias. The man, then, was Ray.

Before he saw, she looked at this flash man that she had loved. Her lips were open. He was flash all right, like some commercial.

"Why, hello, Mum," said Ray. "Didn't see yer there."

Amy Parker looked amongst her plants. "I sit here sometimes," she said, "in the afternoon. To get the sun. I didn't expect to see you. What have you come here for?"

"Ah, come off it, Mum," said Ray, who was still attempting to be friendly in the manner of big fleshy men, laughing, and sure of himself. Then he remembered. "Why do I always have to be after something with you people? Can't I just arrive and hang around? I wanted to come out here and look at the place again. I been thinking about it. That's all."

But she was putty-coloured, looking along the dark leaves of plants.

He would talk, though.

"I wouldn't'uv recognized the place," he said, conscious of his suit. "You've let yourself get overgrown. It'll push you out, Mum. What then, eh? Remember the swallows' nests? I got the eggs one year and blew them with a glass tube, and kept them in a cardboard box on cotton wool. Till they broke. They broke," he said. "Remember?"

"No," she said.

Whether she did or not. She raised her head slightly.

Then the man spat into the undergrowth of fuchsias.

He was collapsed and bilious-looking. Memories in some circumstances are a crime.

"I didn't bring you anything," he said.

Though he almost had. A big box of chocolates with a pink satin bow. Handing things, you can make better excuses for yourself. Now he was standing without presents, at a loss.

The old woman had been looking for some time at the little boy, who was peering through the windows of the house to see what there was inside.

"That's the boy," said Ray now.

"What boy?" asked the mother.

"Lola's kid."

"Who is Lola?" she asked, though she knew.

Ray was telling her.

The grandmother was looking at the little boy, or at the back of his head, which was burning.

"Come 'ere, sonny," said Ray. "Come an show yourself to your grandmother."

The boy came forward. He was looking up at the old woman. He was very beautiful now.

"This one is not mine," said the old woman. "The other boy is mine. The real one."

"This is a fine healthy boy," said the man.

"Healthy or not," said the old woman, getting up.

She went inside.

"You had better go, Ray," she said. "I don't want to see you. Or the boy. I have to get your father's tea."

Closing the brown door.

"This is my son," shouted Ray Parker. "He's the dead spit of me!"

For that reason she would have kissed him, but had run from it, and was trembling the other side of the door. She must love the other one, and did truly, though rather pale, the one to whom she had given the heirloom of glass. So she was trembling.

After he had listened to his mother's breathing for some time, and cursed her, the man left the door.

"Come on then," he said to the boy.

In their best clothes they went slowly down to the road that led back to Durilgai.

Amy Parker watched this progress from a golden window, but the room was dark inside, and filled by a clock. Shall I go out? she said, they are slow. The dust was slow, the slow clock ticking in her blood. But as the man and boy mounted higher in her throat, she still stood. And that boy with Ray's mouth, kissing the face of the marble clock, or sleeping. She still stood. Then Ray had really gone, or darkness come, and something was burning on the stove.

When she thought over this incident, amongst her tended plants, on still winter afternoons, wondering whether she had done right, she would arrive at different conclusions, invariably, on different afternoons.

The second visit that Amy Parker received that winter was of a different nature altogether. It did not rend, though it disturbed. It was unexpected, and Amy Parker no longer liked that. Even to be caught out by her own face unexpectedly in mirrors she did not care for.

Anyway, Thelma came down, drove down in the afternoon, and this was usual.

Thelma came in and said, "How are you, Mum dear?"

As if she were expecting her mother to be sick.

"I am all right, thank you," said the old woman, and began to sharpen.

Thelma was dressed well. Thelma's dress was never noticed, it

was rich but too discreet. Now it was her mother looking, though, who saw that Thelma was dressed extra well.

"I have brought a friend," said Thelma Forsdyke, "who is most anxious to meet you."

This is a most dishonest friend, the old woman felt.

"What friend?" she asked incredulously.

"It is a lady," said Mrs. Forsdyke. "It is my friend Mrs. Fisher. I have brought a box of little cakes. There need be no fuss," she said.

"In my house," said Amy Parker, "I will have to make a batch of scones. Do you think the pumpkin ones, or does she like them plain?"

"I am sure I do not know," said Thelma Forsdyke. "It is unnecessary."

"But she is your friend."

"Friendship is not fed on scones, Mother. We have interests in common."

It was puzzling. It was evident also that Mrs. Fisher was approaching, at leisure, though with confidence.

"Mrs. Parker, we have disturbed you," she said with a deliberate smile. "You hate the unexpected, I can see. I do too. In small matters anyway. But if there is to be a genuine eruption, with clouds of smoke and sheets of flame, let it erupt unexpectedly. That can be exhilarating."

Her mouth was red.

"Will you sit down then," Amy Parker asked, "while I get us some tea?"

"Thank you," said Mrs. Fisher. "Lots of lovely tea. One of the things I dare to admit. When I am on my own, which happens sometimes at my age, I always drink the pot dry."

Letting a nasty little piece of fur fall upon the floor beside her chair. The little piece of fur was, in fact, sable, but Mrs. Fisher forgot this on policy.

Not so Thelma, who ran to retrieve and brush the fur. Mrs. Fisher, of course, had been at the game a long time, and was richer than the rich, she could afford forgetfulness.

"I will make some scones," said Amy Parker, who looked out

no longer on her own room, but onto some stage, upon which electric actresses, speaking the foreign language of a play, were taking positions.

Mrs. Fisher coruscated. "Scones? Dare we?" she asked of Mrs. Forsdyke.

But Thelma had forgotten the reply. She was two people in this room, in which she had played at ludo. She was confused.

"Why?" asked Mrs. Parker. "Are you not allowed to eat scones?"

"Oh," said Mrs. Fisher, "it is one's figure. It is always with one."

"Funny old thing," said Mrs. Forsdyke when her mother had gone.

"Rather sweet," sighed Mrs. Fisher, who was looking around in someone else's house.

"And this house. It is a real room. It is fascinating to see that people do live. Darling, I am so grateful that you should have brought me."

Thelma Forsdyke winced. She was not at all glad.

"It is a simple room," she said.

"There is no such thing as simplicity," said Mrs. Fisher.

"I hated it at one time."

"Of course. What one is close to, one hates," said Mrs. Fisher.

She held her head on one side. She had her friend beneath a pin. "But ugly furniture can be most interesting," she went on, she smiled. "It has reality."

"Are you interested in *everything*?" asked Thelma irritably.

"Oh yes," said Mrs. Fisher. "One must be interested, otherwise one would be bored."

Mrs. Forsdyke, who was made breathless by uninterrupted contact with her admirable friend, said that in spite of orders she would slip into the kitchen to investigate the situation. Her own nonentity pursued her down the passage.

Mrs. Fisher, on the other hand, sat but did not wait, it was enough to sit in that room, which seemed to create for her the pocket into which she had desired to get. I wish I could remember

clearly, she said, but am I honest enough? She sat, and closed her eyes, and frowned, which gave her a black look above the nose. Trying to remember herself as a girl, but all she could see was a satin dress, with beads, were they? yes, she was always well trimmed. Trying to remember her first glimpse of life.

When the scones were brought in, and some cups with pansies on them, and a plated teapot that had got a dent on one side, Mrs. Fisher opened her eyes quickly, so that they flashed out into the room, and she began to turn on her pivot, and to radiate generally, like some imperious searchlight.

"Mrs. Parker," she flashed, "I have sat in your room, which is perfect, by the way, and learned you off by heart. I know you *intimately*."

"Then you know more than me," said Mrs. Parker, who was glad she had the plates to do things with, and did.

"Persuade your mother, Christine, that I am sincere by nature," commanded the glinting Mrs. Fisher.

"Christine?"

But Thelma blushed. It had been a secret from her mother naturally.

"It is a name," said the thin Mrs. Forsdyke, coughing it off, "a name that some of my friends know me by."

"Oh?" said the mother, dipping her voice.

But Thelma was Thelma. Poor Thelmy. The old woman sat there, herself reddening, smiling for strange occurrences, the butter running between her fingers from good scones. Silly girl, she said. Then she licked her fingers, and enjoyed doing so.

Between bites, for which they bared their teeth artistically, the two visitors had begun to discuss Mabel, who was married to some sort of lord. Mabel, the old woman had begun to gather, was poor in spite of motorcars.

"Because he treats her to per-fect hell," Mrs. Fisher said.

"But it is a lovely place," suggested Mrs. Forsdyke cautiously.

Not knowing Mabel, her shots were timid, even perilous, but she loved to play the anxious game.

"Oh, the *place*," said Mrs. Fisher. "We drove down to see

them last time we were over. Poor Mabel would have been hurt. The place is—well, what you would expect. All oak and staircases. If you like oak.”

Mrs. Forsdyke, who had thought she did, made a suitably dismal noise.

“But now they are at Antibes,” she said.

In fact, she had read.

But Mrs. Fisher’s mouth was temporarily gone. When she had put it back, and touched her hair, which had begun life as red and was finishing it redder, she said carefully and kindly, “None of this is very interesting for poor Mrs. Parker.”

The old woman could not decently protest that this was not so, and consequently became restless, looking from one to the other of the sterile women with whom she was sitting. The one was her daughter, and could be dismissed as known, according to accepted standards, if not in fact. The second woman, though, was aggravating to Mrs. Parker, as dreams do aggravate, that will not come right up and surface on the morning after.

“Though you also most probably know the person we have been discussing,” said Mrs. Fisher considerately. “Mabel Armstrong that was. They lived in this district. Their property was Glastonbury.”

“Of course I knew Armstrongs,” said Mrs. Parker with superiority, because the immediate district and the past were her preserves. “Mr. Armstrong was the one I knew best. But I would see the girls about, and talk with them.”

“It was a handsome house,” said Mrs. Fisher, whose voice had cracked.

“It has pretty nearly tumbled down,” said Amy Parker brutally. “Through neglect.”

“It is sad,” said Thelma, getting up. “And such a rich property. Mrs. Fisher used to stay there as a girl. Didn’t you, Madeleine?”

Madeleine was rising from the ashes. Amy Parker drew her breath in very quickly through her teeth.

“Ahhh,” she said. “It was you then. Madeleine!”

Mrs. Fisher, who had got to her feet without assistance, adopted one of those positions for which she was famous and said, "Why? Did we meet?"

"No," said Amy Parker. "Not exactly. You were riding a horse along the roads. A black horse. You had a habit, it was a dark green, I think, anyway dark."

"I did have a habit of bottle green," said Mrs. Fisher with feverish amusement. "It was very smart. I rode a great deal everywhere. I was often invited to stay at country properties. But I cannot say I remember your roads in particular. One cannot remember everything, Mrs. Parker, in life."

As Amy Parker stood up, she had been slowed by memory, and this also gave her stature. "Do you remember the fires then?" she asked. "The bush fires? And the burning house?"

"Yes," Mrs. Fisher said. "I was nearly lost forever in the fire. Only someone brought me out."

"I think I can just remember the fire at Glastonbury. I was quite small," said Thelma Forsdyke.

"You should be kinder than to reveal the fact," laughed Mrs. Fisher as they went out on compulsion.

Amy Parker, who followed them in slippers, she had not had time to substitute her shoes, remembered the ugly girl whose hair had been singed off.

"It was over there somewhere," said Mrs. Fisher on the step, hesitating on the brink of the cold garden. "Can we see it from here?"

"Not now," said Thelma. "The trees have grown up."

Under that sky, which was of a lilac where it had not drained away, the women were drifting along the path of old bricks. Except for a few liquid birds, the garden was silent as the women.

Presently an old man came from another part of the garden, stooping beneath boughs, and parting the twigs of bushes. He wore blue trousers that were wrinkled at the ankles, altogether his clothes were slack and comfortable, his face wrinkled, orange in that light.

Amy Parker craned her neck. Her eyebrows glistened. These were still curiously full and dark.

"This is my husband," she said.

Thelma kissed the old man when he came, and Mrs. Fisher gave him her glove. They were all standing in a faint glow of golden light. Stan Parker would not look at the strange woman, it seemed, blaming it on the glare from the setting sun.

"Where were you?" asked his wife, angrily smiling.

"I was burning off a few bits of rubbish." There was, in fact, a slight smoke rising, and smell of it, and a few pale tongues flickering from behind twigs.

"My husband is a great one for lighting fires," said Amy Parker.

"It is a lovely smell," said Mrs. Fisher genuinely. "A smell of winter. Here it is lovely, everywhere. There is no end to it."

"Do you keep bees?" she asked, turning quickly to the old man.

"No," said Stan Parker. "I never even thought about it, to tell you the truth."

He did look at the woman once, because it was strange, her asking him. He looked into her crumbling face, of which the eyes were still practised.

"I would like to have kept bees," said Mrs. Fisher. "It is incongruous, I know. But I would have liked to go out, and open the hives, and look inside at the bees clinging there. I know that they would not have harmed me, even if they had swarmed on my wrists. I have no fear of them. Such a lovely, dark, living gold. But now it is too late."

Thelma Forsdyke had begun to put her collar up. She said, "We shall all catch our deaths, standing here in this damp air."

After that she took her friend away. Mrs. Fisher sat smiling through the window of the car, and should have called out something, something memorable for leaving, as was her custom, but she could not. Her dry face was fixed there under her hat. It was remarkable that the bees should have come into her head with such passion, as they quite definitely had, they were not an affectation as they should have been. Now the terrible nostalgia of lost

possibilities was gnawing at her as she looked in amazement at the square wooden house in which the parents of her friend lived. All solutions had eluded her. Once in the deal dressing table of an empty room, of a maid she had dismissed, she had come across a book of dreams, and had looked through it quickly, hungrily, her pearls dangling on the yellow paper. She was looking for a meaning. Then she had laughed and torn up the shoddy thing.

So now, for precise meanings, she looked at the faces of the old couple, more particularly of the old man, both because he was a man and because his orange skin had a glow of quiet fire. But he is not looking at me, she said, shifting her position. Instead she was driven away through the smoke of the dying fire, of that rubbish which he had been burning off. Lives, she realized, can only touch, they do not join. Even on the fiery staircase, they lie along each other fitfully, the eyes do not see farther than the veins in the eyeballs.

Amy Parker touched her husband.

"It is cold," she said. "Let us go in, Stan. I am glad they have gone. But she was a pleasant woman. She said some funny things."

Moving along the path in the pleasant comfort of old woollen garments when people have gone. Till it began to peeve her that her husband did not speak.

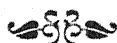
"She came here as a girl," she said carefully. "That is what she said. Stayed somewhere in this locality, Stan."

"In this locality. It would have been Armstrongs' where she stayed," Stan Parker said. "Did you see her hair? It was red."

"It was red out of a packet," said Amy Parker with cold knowledge. "That is what some women do."

And you are so simple, or are you? she asked. But as there was no answer she went into the house.

And he was following her. It was where they lived. He was grateful for all things at dusk, and did not question the impossible. The fires of evening had died to one red line. He could not have believed, anyway, in that burning house, of tremulous harps, and hair.



Chapter 12

THOSE PEOPLE who do not like to associate with death were soon keeping clear of Parkers. Who were going about as if nothing had happened. It was funny. Had not heard about it perhaps. Everybody but Parkers had read the case, of course. So the death-shy began to flicker their eyelids up at the bereaved. They even came out and did good turns to those who absolved them from the embarrassment of sympathizing. They brought presents and ran errands. It made them feel morbid, though.

Then old Mr. Parker read in the paper, after the inquiry had got under way, read that his son was dead. There the old man was, standing in the frost, with his head bare, he had just gone out for the morning paper, and glanced, and was reading at once about the man Ray Parker, shot in the stomach, it said, in some club. He was dead.

It was Ray. Ray was dead, in the white frost, on that same strip of road. Ray, he said, dragging the paper at his side like a wing, flapping it. He looked along the road. It was quite empty. And began again to read the newspaper, about this thing that had happened. He read the names and the ages. The man Ray Parker was well known as a receiver. He had served short jail sentences in other states for housebreaking and theft. He had a reputation on the turf. This was Parkers' son. Evidence was given by the dead man's *de facto* wife, Mary Brill, otherwise known as Lola Brown or Joanne Valera. This woman was an entertainer, it said.

"What are you doing there, Stan?" Amy Parker called. "Come in," she said. "The eggs are ready."

He came in and dropped the paper down behind a dresser of

THE TREE OF MAN

heavy cedar, that she did not move, except in spring, when she would ask him to help her with it. So there the paper was, lying with the dust.

Soon after this Stan Parker said to his wife, "I am going up to Sydney, Amy, on some business."

"Oh," she said.

She was content. She did not ask. Whole days Amy Parker would spend about her house, looking into drawers, at objects she had forgotten, or at plants which were leaning out towards the sun.

Stan Parker, who had been shocked out of grief, would have liked to talk to someone. He would have liked to talk to his daughter-in-law, but Elsie and her boy were travelling in another state, with her father, a retired grocer, a solid man. And Thelma had gone to New Zealand with her husband, on what is called a semi-business trip. Ray is dead, said Stan Parker. He began to think about the little boy, which was what little he knew of his son. In the train the old man cried a bit at last.

When they reached the city he was pushed about a good deal at Central Station, and realized he had very little idea what he was going to do. He would not, perhaps, do anything at all. What could he do? All the while, though, in spite of his drifting and indecision, he was making his way, it seemed, asking here and there, till he was getting close to the street in which the dead man had lived.

When Stan Parker came to the street, he was quickly brought to the house by some children who had learned all the details of the murder. They took him up the stairs, but on the landing they left him.

Presently a woman came to the door on the landing. She stood there, waiting to be accused of something. The old man thought, What else but Ray's death could have brought me to this woman?

"This is where Ray Parker lived?" he asked.

"Yes," she said quickly, or hiccupped, from all the tears she had shed.

"I am his father," said the old man.

She was not glad. She was dulled.

"I don't know what I've got to give you. I don't want you to talk about death," she said when they were sitting at a table with their hands in front of them. "I had enough of that. I would give you a drink if there was any. You don't know how many friends you got until there is a death and they drink you dry. After Ray was murdered we was sold out."

The old man wished he could say something to this woman, and felt foolish because he could not.

"I would have liked to help you," he said, wondering upon what crazy promise he might embark.

"You cannot help people," she said, exonerating him. "They must do it themselves. In that way, at least, you are independent." She blew her nose.

"Will you stay here?" he asked.

"I have not got the faintest," said the wife of the dead man, who had brought a packet of cigarettes, and had shoved one into her mouth as if it had been food, and had blown smoke from her nose in a long trumpet.

"Did you ever know," she asked, "what you was going to do?"

"Yes," he said with an assumed certainty.

He felt, in fact, that his own intentions had always developed like smoke. They were carried.

"I could never answer for anything that happened," said the woman, swallowing a big mouthful and belching it out with thoughtful indigestion. "At home," she said, mentioning some railway siding in the Northwest, "I would say as I would do this or that. I would be a singer, I said. Because I had a lovely voice. *Then*. I could sing 'One Fine Day' and all that, and hit the notes all right. I was artistic. I got jobs with several shows. But I did not become a singer as I had intended, and had been convinced I would. It was not from not still wanting. It was as if I had been shunted off. I would wake at night, and listen to the trams pass, and know that I was fixed there. I cried sometimes, but I did not care really. I was free, anyways, to take the tram to Watsons

Bay, and jump over, or buy meself a good red steak, or get some man. That that was all I did not yet know. Because I was young. What I was, really, was a slave," said the woman, breathing heavily. "Though I did not wake up to it for some time. Then when I did I started looking for someone to free me. I was looking and looking."

The old man, who was again anxious to talk about his son, or at least the one he knew, and to hear some good spoken of him, that is to say, of himself, asked, "How long, then, did you know Ray?"

The eyeballs of the woman called Lola were fixed by looking.

"All my life," she said with certainty. "I knew Ray in one body or another. Sometimes I would look into his eyes and try to see what else there was, but I never ever succeeded."

"Do you pray to God?"

"I will not be any other kind of slave," screamed Lola. "And what do you, anyways, know about God?"

"Not much," said the old man. "But I hope that in the end I shall know something. What else is there that would be any use to learn?"

"Ah dear, I haven't the patience," said Lola. "Sometimes I think I will go back home after all. I want to sit. I was freer there, I think, before. Or have I forgotten? Or did I dream this since? There was a few dead trees in that plain. I want to sit there, beside the chicken wire. There was nothing else," she said, "but space. That is better than prayer."

"Freedom. But prayer is freedom, or should be. If a man has got faith."

"No," she cried. "No, no, no!" Quickly purpling. "You are trying to catch me," she said. "But I won't be caught."

"How can I catch you," he asked, "when I am caught myself? I am tied up."

"Old men," she grumbled, "were always the worst. They think that if they talk they will show you they are strong. I don't want any kind, not strong, or old, or any."

"Mu-um," called the little boy, coming in. "Mu-ummm."

"What is it?" she asked, catching her freed breath.

"I want a piece of cheese."

"There is no cheese," she said.

"Just a bit."

"Little boys don't go around eating cheese."

"I do," he said.

"Well, that is too bad."

When the silence had rubbed against her for a bit she went into the kitchenette, took down a tin canister with some flowers on it, and pared a slice of soapy cheese. "There," she said. "There is no more."

He did not thank her, because it was his due. He had to eat.

The old man sat looking. It could have been his son. He felt like saying to the mother, I shall tell you what is in store for you, but of course she would not have believed. So instead he asked the boy, "Do you know who I am?"

Foolishly, aware at once that he must suffer.

For the boy looked and said, "No."

It was obvious, with his mouth full of cheese, that he did not want to know.

"Ray never ever mentioned you," said the woman dreamily, and without callousness. She was smoothing the boy's live hair, that she could smell faintly, and was smiling.

"This is your grandfather," she said, "come to see us."

The old man wished that she had not.

"Why?" asked the boy.

Nobody could answer that.

The boy flicked his head, to free it.

"I don't want any grandfather," he said, suspecting all that was not food or pleasure.

"That is bold," said the mother in an unrepining voice.

The old man accepted what he had deserved.

"Come and let me brush your hair," said the mother to the boy, she was in love with that hair.

"No," he said. "Not now."

"Just a little bit," she begged, fetching a small brush with a handle. "Ah yes, come on, Ray."

So this one was Ray too.

The old man saw that he must leave her to her slavery. She was drunk with love and the smell of her child's hair. So he prepared to go.

As he went along the passage, which was dimmed further by old linoleum of a brown colour, the woman called Lola came running after him and said, "I cannot thank you."

"For what?"

"You have made me see things."

His eyes that looked at her were blinded by his own confusion.

"This necessary slavery," she said, "if that is what you were trying to say."

As he went away, surprised that he could light anyone with his own darkness.

But this is one of the extraordinary things.

When Stan Parker got home, after undoing the little chain which they had put on the gate as a protection from cattle that strayed from the country lower down, he saw that Amy was sitting on the veranda, as she often did, but that she was disrupted. Would he be able to face it? he wondered as his feet went forward.

"What is it?" he asked.

Though he knew.

As he went forward he saw that there was still a thin girl encased in this comfortable old woman, and was himself cut open by the poignance of it.

"I thought I would keep it from you for a bit," he said. "That is all."

As going forward he put out his hands. He would never reach her.

"It is all right," she said, daring him to touch her, because she was finished with crying. "I have been through all this before, many times, only a little different. But you don't expect it when it comes."

When it came, Amy Parker had been sitting on the veranda in the clear day. Then she heard the chain. It was a fumbling of someone who was a stranger to it, who came in at last, bundling

past those shrubs of oleanders, and straggly roses that catch at clothes, and will even tear strangers, making them annoyed.

The stranger came on, who was no stranger, it appeared, finally, but Mrs. O'Dowd, who was Mrs. Parker's friend of years.

"Well," said Mrs. O'Dowd, "you are a nice sort of friend, if that is what you can be called, I am not at all sure."

"Well," said Mrs. Parker, "you leave things, and then the time is gone."

She doubted whether she was pleased.

"Are you good?" asked Mrs. O'Dowd.

"I am good," said Mrs. Parker, who did not get up nor offer anything whatsoever.

Mrs. O'Dowd had a melted look, it was now seen. "Where is Mr. Parker?" she asked. Nothing would come out in this place to greet an old friend.

"He is gone to the city. On business," Mrs. Parker said.

"Ahhh," Mrs. O'Dowd sighed. "The men can occupy themselves in that way. But he will be cut up, I can imagine, as men are, and will not show it. I have been commiseratun with him. An with you too naturally, my dear. I say that, an it will sound foolish. An us friends."

"What do you mean, Mrs. O'Dowd?" Amy Parker asked. "I do not understand."

"Ah," Mrs. O'Dowd gulped. "I would not'uv spoke otherwise, only I thought that you would most certainly'uv heard."

"I have not heard." Amy Parker listened to her own loud, cold voice.

"Then, dear me," said Mrs. O'Dowd, looking in that bag which would not shut, and which she carried on occasions of importance, to pay the rates, to funerals, and to such like, and in which she found finally the piece of paper she had kept, for no reason, she had read and learned the sentences, except that she was not brave, she was not enough, to say, and so she gave the piece of paper.

"There," she said.

And Amy Parker, who had known in an instant of split sky, read also that her son was dead.

She was sitting there alone. Ray, she said, I told you, I told you. Though what she had told she did not well know. Then her love came out in a great burst, she was kissing him, and cried.

Till the neighbour woman, who was watching what she had achieved, through no personal malice but a little grudge, began herself to feel sad. "It is us women that will allus pay. Remember that, Mrs. Parker, when you take on, we are all of us in the same boat. Ah dear, it is terrible," she said.

But Amy Parker was alone. A great hollow of cold was about her. I should do something, said Amy Parker, but what? There was nothing, of course, to do.

"Have you a drop, perhaps, in the house, of something?" Mrs. O'Dowd asked.

Mrs. Parker had not.

"Ah dear, the poor souls," Mrs. O'Dowd cried.

And as they mourned they did to some extent melt together. Their pockets were interchangeable, for handkerchiefs and kindnesses. Their thoughts and hair strayed together.

The neighbour woman was noisier, because she had been crying for her friend, just as Amy Parker was quiet, because the grief was hers.

Then when she had gathered herself and was for going off, Mrs. O'Dowd touched her friend and said, "You will come to see me, Mrs. Parker, when you are feelun better, like, an we will talk about old times."

And Amy Parker said, "Yes. I will come. Some day. And have a cup."

When she had lived in its entirety the event that was still occurring. But that would be a matter of time.

So she was still sitting, an old and heavy woman, when Stan came in, and from her distance she saw that he had suffered, and that she would not be able to help.

"What else are we intended to do if we have failed in this?" asked the old man, who had been creased by his journey.

His skull was hollow-looking.

"It is so late," he said.

Then she stirred, and shivered, choosing stupidity.

"There will be a frost," she said deliberately. "And I have not attended to the fire."

"At our age," he pursued. "With nothing to show."

"I do not understand," said his wife, pulling down her sleeves, of the coarse stuff of ropes. "It is all above me. I do not understand a thing."

"But we must try to, Amy."

"What good will it do? Provided that we live our lives."

"But it is not intended to be easy. Even now."

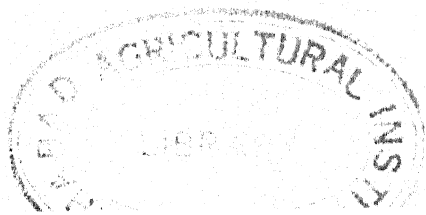
"I don't understand you, Stan," she said, quickly putting her hands to her mouth.

"I am little enough to understand," said the old man.

"We have ourselves," said his wife, forcing back her unhappiness into her mouth. "The mysteries are not for us, Stan. Stan? Stan?"

She could not bear him to escape her in a general greyness of speculation, so she began to draw him towards her, using some warmth of her own, almost as if she had been a younger woman, and when they had searched each other they began to see in the depths of their eyes that even their failures were necessary.

So the old people recovered in time, except for a stiffness of their bones, these never did recover from the beating that they got. And the paddocks remained blurred. The winter cabbages that Stan Parker put would run together in a purple blur, till at his feet, then they would open up in true splendour, the metal leaves breaking open, offering their jewels of water on blue platters. She would come to him often amongst the cabbages. They were happy then, warming themselves on flat words and their nearness to each other.





Chapter 13

THE DAY Stan Parker died he had been poking about in the back garden a bit, or sitting, mostly sitting, in a coat that she had made him wear, of old discoloured tweed, because that clear, candid sunlight would withdraw swiftly and treacherously from the immediate vicinity, uncovering bottomless wells of cold and the blue pools of evening. So the old man sat there in his coat and a cap. He had a black stick, which he walked with now, or propped against his chair, ever since the stroke he had suffered several months ago.

Amy Parker did not speak about that. You do not speak about strokes, especially those which fell members of the family. She would hand the black stick, if it was ever out of reach, hand it back as if it were not visible. How simply Stan, a big man, had fallen down with the connivance of God, and had lain there, blasted. Finlaysons were with them at the time. Jack and Merle had come over about something, and to yarn. It was round about eleven o'clock. She had poured tea. They were all looking back at Stan for long minutes, and asking what to do, not for then, it is easy enough to pick a man up, but for always. They had to have some direction, it seemed, for the future. Only the present will not wait. It is itself potential future. And so, as no communications were forthcoming, Jack Finlayson stepped forward and picked Stan up.

It got round, of course, what had happened to Mr. Parker, because Finlaysons were there. They had to tell what they had seen, for nothing of a transcendental nature had happened in their lives ever before. But there were others round about who began to shy away from Parkers after this. Most people do not want to

be the bystanders at death, particularly the living death of some old person.

The old woman was glad people let them alone, or confined their attentions to formal kindnesses. So that she was able to watch her husband in peace, and, in such time as remained, devote herself to discovering whether it was still possible at this last moment to love a person in that measure in which he should be loved.

As for the old man, he was quite content to sit in the rather cold sunlight, but well wrapped up. He was soon hobbling about proppily on the stick. He would even go down to the tool shed sometimes, and move the tools from one position to another. Followed by that black dog.

It would be Stan Parker's last dog, and was itself a great age, distracted by canker and the itch.

"All dogs like Stan," said his wife, pinching up her eyebrows tragically. "They follow him around. There was that red one when we first came here, that I could never stand, lolloping thing, would not let me touch him. Some young dog he had picked up as a boy. Look at this one now. All his teeth gone, or stumps. Stan will not have him put away, though."

That afternoon the old man's chair had been put on the grass at the back, which was quite dead-looking from the touch of winter. Out there at the back, the grass, you could hardly call it a lawn, had formed a circle in the shrubs and trees which the old woman had not so much planted as stuck in during her lifetime. There was little of design in the garden originally, though one had formed out of the wilderness. It was perfectly obvious that the man was seated at the heart of it, and from this heart the trees radiated, with grave movements of life, and beyond them the sweep of a vegetable garden, which had gone to weed during the months of the man's illness, presented the austere skeletons of cabbages and the wands of onion seed. All was circumference to the centre, and beyond that the worlds of other circles, whether crescent of purple villas or the bare patches of earth not yet built upon. The last circle but one was the cold and golden bowl of

winter, enclosing all that was visible and material, and at which the man would blink from time to time, unequal to the effort of realizing he was the centre of it.

The large, triumphal scheme of which he was becoming mysteriously aware made him shift in his seat, and resent the entrance of the young man, who had jumped the fence and was coming down towards him, stepping over beds rather than following paths, he was so convinced of achieving his mission by direct means and approaches.

When the young man had reached the old one, who purposely did not look up, but at the shoe which had approached, and which was crushing the brown nets of clover, he burst at once into a speech, addressing the button of the old man's cap.

He said, "I just wanted to have a little talk, sir. I was passing, and saw you sitting here on this beautiful day. I wanted, when I saw you, sir, to bring to you the story of the Gospels and of Our Lord. I wanted to tell you of my own experience, and how it is possible for the most unlikely to be saved."

The old man was most unhappy.

"I was a fettler. I don't know whether you know anything of conditions in the fettlers' camps," said the young man, whose experience was filling his eyes, even to the exclusion of his present mission, the old man. "Drinking and whoring most weekends," he said. "We would go down into the nearest settlement and carry back the drink. The women would come up along the line, knowing where the camp was. There were black women too."

The old man was intensely unhappy.

When the young one had finished, he presented the open palms of his hands and told how he had knelt upon his knees, and grace descended on him. "This can happen to you too," he said, kneeling on one knee, and sweating at every pore.

The old man cleared his throat. "I'm not sure whether I am intended to be saved," he said.

The evangelist smiled with youthful incredulity. "You don't understand," he said smilingly.

If you can understand, at your age, what I have been struggling with all my life, then it is a miracle, thought the old man.

He spat on the ground in front of him. He had been sitting for some time in one position, and had on his chest a heaviness of phlegm. "I am too old," he said colourlessly.

"Don't you believe in God, perhaps?" asked the evangelist, who had begun to look around him and to feel the necessity for some further stimulus of confession. "I can show you books," he yawned.

Then the old man, who had been cornered long enough, saw, through perversity perhaps, but with his own eyes. He was illuminated. He pointed with his stick at the gob of spittle.

"That is God," he said.

As it lay glittering intensely and personally on the ground.

The young man frowned rather. You met all kinds.

"Look," he said. "Here's some books that I will leave with you. Take your time. Have a read. Some of them's light enough."

After he had gone and the tracts were flapping and plapping in the undergrowth, the old man continued to stare at the jewel of spittle. A great tenderness of understanding rose in his chest. Even the most obscure, the most sickening incidents of his life were clear. In that light.

Stan Parker began to go then. To walk. Though his hip was stiff.

I believe in this leaf, he laughed, stabbing at it with his stick.

When he had reached the side of the house on which the shrubby, gnarled honeysuckle had grown too big, and had reached over, and was scratching the side of the house, his wife was standing on the step.

"What is it, Stan?" she asked.

Her face was afraid.

I believe, he said, in the cracks in the path. On which ants were massing, struggling up over an escarpment. But struggling. Like the painful sun in the icy sky. Whirling and whirling. But struggling. But joyful. So much so, he was trembling. The sky was blurred now. As he stood waiting for the flesh to be loosened

on him, he prayed for greater clarity, and it became obvious as a hand. It was clear that One, and no other figure, is the answer to all sums.

"Stan," cried his wife, running, because she really was afraid that she had been left behind.

They clung together for a minute on the broken concrete path, their two souls wrestling together. She would have dragged him back if she could, to share her further sentence, which she could not contemplate for that moment, except in terms of solitary confinement. So she was holding him with all the strength of her body and her will. But he was escaping from her.

He could not tell her she would not find it in his face. She was already too far.

"It is all right," he said.

Amy Parker did not cry much, because she had often visualized this event. She got up unsteadily, she was a heavy old woman, and went through the garden with tenderness, in a torn stocking, to call those people who would come and give her material assistance. She promised herself great comfort from this. And from the grandson, Elsie's boy, in whose eyes her own obscure, mysterious life would grow transparent at last.

So she rounded the corner of the empty house. Whimpering a little for those remnants of love and habit that were clinging to her. Stan is dead. My husband. In the boundless garden.

In the end there are the trees. These still stand in the gully behind the house, on a piece of poor land that nobody wants to use. There is the ugly mass of scrub, full of whips and open secrets. But there are the trees, quite a number of them that have survived the axe. On still mornings after frost these stand streaming with light and moisture.

The rather leggy, pale boy comes down later into the bush. The scraggy boy, who has grown too long for his pants and for the arms of his coat, has come down from the house of death because he cannot stand it any longer. Well, his grandfather is dead. An old man, whom he loved, but at a distance, amongst

wood shavings. Death gave the boy a fright, but he had soon recovered, and absorbed all its strange and interesting details. Then he had begun to suffocate. What can I do? he said.

So he had come away into the bush. He lay on his back, on the sandy earth, on the root fibres and decomposing leaves.

What would he do?

He would write a poem, he said. He would write a poem of death. Long words wired for the occasion, marble words of dictionaries, paper words in rat traps would decorate his poem. He was a bit frightened of it. But of course he did not believe in it, not really. He could not believe in death.

So he would write a poem of life, of all life, of what he did not know, but knew. Of all people, even the closed ones, who do open on asphalt and in trains. He would make the trains run on silver lines, the people still dreaming on their shelves, who will wake up soon enough and feel for their money and their teeth. Little bits of coloured thought, that he had suddenly, and would look at for a long time, would go into his poem, and urgent telegrams, and the pieces of torn letters that fall out of metal baskets. He would put the windows that he had looked inside. Sleep, of course, that blue eider-down that divides life from life. His poem was growing. It would have the smell of bread, and the rather grey wisdom of youth, and his grandmother's kumquats, and girls with yellow plaits exchanging love-talk behind their hands, and the blood thumping like a drum, and red apples, and a little wisp of white cloud that will swell into a horse and trample the whole sky once it gets the wind inside it.

As his poem mounted in him he could not bear it, or rather, what was still his impotence. And after a bit, not knowing what else to do, he went back to the house in which his grandfather had died, taking with him his greatness, which was still a secret.

So that in the end there were the trees. The boy walking through them with his head drooping as he increased in stature. Putting out shoots of green thought. So that, in the end, there was no end.

